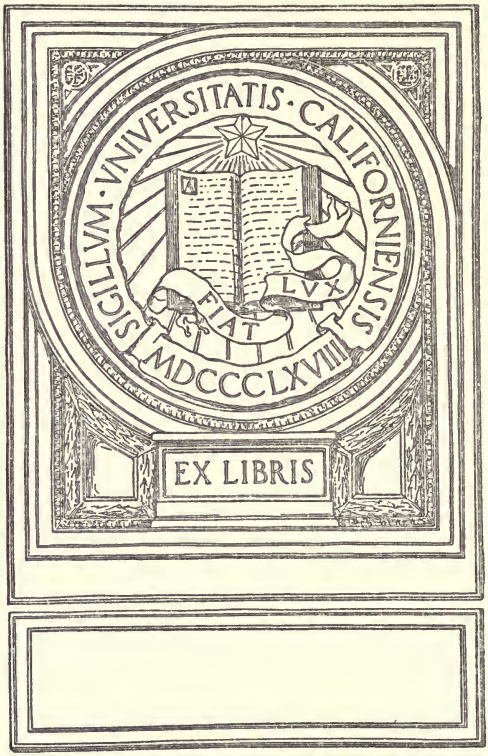
LITTLE DINNERS WITH THE SPHINX

RICHARD LE GALLIENNE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LITTLE DINNERS
WITH THE SPHINX
AND
OTHER PROSE FANCIES

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By

RICHARD LE GALLIENNE

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TO EVA

CONTENTS

Little Dinners With the Sphinx

I

ON THE EDGE OF THE STARLIGHT

THE Sphinx and I had not met for quite a long time. We had n't dined together for — O I should think — four years; and it was strange to both of us to be sitting opposite to each other once more in the friendly glitter of a little dinner table — that glitter which is made up of skillfully mitigated electric light falling on various delicate objects of pleasure: the slim, fluted crystal of the wineglasses, the lustral linen, the tinkling ice in its silver jug, the moon-white roses, and the opals on the Sphinx's long fingers.

We were both a trifle conscious, and we looked at each other half inquiringly across the table.

"Are we the same people?" presently asked the Sphinx.

"Of course, you are, my dear Sphinx; but I hope, for your sake, that I am not."

"For my sake?"

"I mean that it is a poor compliment to a woman one adores always to bring the same man to dinner."

"I see — you have n't changed a bit. . . . . Yes, you have," she added, after a pause. "Why, you 're growing grey. How have you managed that at your age?"

"'Sorrows like mine would blanch an angel's hair,'" I answered, with pathos, quoting from a noble sonnet of our own time.

"Sorrows! If you said pleasures, you would be nearer the mark. It is pleasure, not sorrow, that makes the butterfly's wings turn grey."

"One's sorrows are one's pleasures — are they not?" I retorted.

"Yes!" said the Sphinx, wistfully, "you are right. 'Of our tears she hath made us pearls, and of our sobbing she hath made unto us a song' — who said that? Was it you?"

"Very likely," said I.

"Yes! you are right," she continued. "Our pleasures we could spare — but not our sorrows — our beautiful sorrows."

"Sorrows," I ventured, "are the opals of the soul."

Then the Sphinx stretched her opalled hand across the table and patted mine and said, "You dear," just as in the old days.

The tears came to my eyes.

"Mark your influence!" I said. "That is the first good thing I have said for four years."

"What appalling faithfulness!" laughed the Sphinx. "But I would rather a man were faithful to me with his brain than with his heart. It means more. Faithful hearts are comparatively common — but when a man is faithful with his brain. . . . ."

"His hair turns grey," I got in.

"Yes! Now tell me about your grey hair. I am sure you have some beautiful explanation to offer, some picturesque excuse, some vindicatory fancy."

"Suppose I were to say that I grew it grey

to please a girl who thought she would like it so?"

"I should believe you — for I never knew a man who would do so much for a woman as you!" answered the Sphinx, laughing. "And did — or rather does — she like it?"

"No," I answered sadly, "she thought she would, but she does n't. She wants it brown again, but it is too late."

"It will always be brown for me," said the Sphinx.

Sentiment threatened us a moment, but the April cloud passed without falling.

"Tell me another reason," asked the Sphinx, "you have plenty more I am sure."

"To tell the truth there are several explanations," I continued gravely. "I hardly know which to choose. The scientific one is probably this: Nature is beginning to retrench. She cannot afford any longer to keep up so expensive a house of life. Her bank account of vitality is no longer what it was. Time was when she poured her blood through one's veins like a spendthrift, and kept up ever

so fine and flashing a style. One's members lived like princes in their pride, and there was colour and dash for all and to spare. But now nature feels that she can no longer afford this prodigality — she feels, as I said, the need of retrenchment. So, looking about the house of life, she says to herself: 'Here I can spare a little,' and 'We can dispense with this,' and 'We can no longer afford that.' Then, coming to the hair, she says sorrowfully: 'This brown colour is very expensive, I can no longer afford it. We must be content with grey.' Soon she will find the eyes too expensive to keep up in their present brightness, and the ears will have to be content with a reduced supply of sound. . . . ."

"For Heaven's sake, stop," said the Sphinx. "You give one the creeps. You are as bad as 'Everyman,' or 'Holbein's Dance of Death.'"

"Well, then, I'll tell you the real reason," I rejoined. "Two winters ago I played snowball with a little child I love. She managed to hit me here on my temple, and it has n't melted yet."

"Just one more reason!"

"Well, the true reason is," I said, really solemnly this time, "that I am passing out of the sunlight into the starlight. . . . . Will you come with me?"

"I will," said the Sphinx, after a pause, taking my hand.

II

THE MYSTICISM OF GASTRONOMY

EVEN our digestion is governed by angels!" said William Blake — one of those picturesque phrases with which he was wont to flash on us the mystery that abides eternally just under the surface of the familiar. I have often recalled the phrase as I sat at dinner with the Sphinx; and not, of course, in any trivial, punning spirit, but seriously in regard to that sensitive mood of harmony, and of keen exhilarating intimacy, which seems to come over us when we thus sit at dinner together as it never comes at any other time.

"Why is it," I asked her recently, after our old friendly waiter had welcomed us with the smile that we really believe he keeps just for us, and had seen us comfortably settled

in our own quiet corner, "why is it that I always feel happier with you at dinner than at any other time?"

"You have the dinner as well," answered the Sphinx, laughing, "on other occasions you have only — me."

"Admitting the profundity of your explanation," I rejoined, "I think there must be a still deeper one — but what it is I cannot say. For instance, we are happy together when we take a walk through the woods, or sit through the afternoon in the old garden, or read a book together. How happy we have been on the sea together, with no one but we two under the blue sky. Yet I have never felt so near to you, never so at harmony with you, as when we have sat at this table and looked into each other's eyes over our wineglasses. Why is it?"

"Just what I say! Very evidently, by your own showing — it is dinner that makes the difference. Not in the woods you say, not in the garden, not with books, not on the sea — not anywhere but at dinner.

Ergo, the only possible explanation is — dinner."

"I am inclined to think you are right," said I, "if only you will give the term dinner an inclusive significance, and not ascribe the whole miracle to the cooking."

"The cooking has much to do with it, I am convinced," persisted the Sphinx, looking more radiantly spiritual than I ever saw her look before. "It is so good that its part in the process passes to some extent unnoticed— though I trust the excellence of these mushrooms is not lost upon you. Were the *chef* to be changed for the worse, I 'm not so sure you would find that harmony you speak of."

"Then I have owed more to the *chef* than I have ever realised," said I, raising my glass to her, and making that salute to her eyes which, however gay our mood, has always a curiously grave, almost sacramental, quality. "Still," I continued presently, "I am not entirely convinced. Your argument has a negative force, I admit. Bad cooking, like

any other extraneous annoyance, might, of course, distract us a little, and so superficially interrupt our harmony; but it is one thing to admit that, and another to say that it follows because bad cooking might destroy our harmony, good cooking therefore makes it. No, I am convinced that the miracle comes of a conflux of pleasant influences, good food and wine being amongst them, which never entirely meet together except at the dinner-table. First of all, the day is over. Its work is behind us. Its anxiety is locked up for the day. We meet the good hour in an attitude of gayety, and we meet it in an atmosphere of other gay people who have come to meet it in the same spirit. Then we meet it refreshed by the lustration of the evening toilet, and arrayed with regard to the pleasure of the eyes we specially aim to please. . . . ."

"Are they pleased to-night?" interrupted the Sphinx.

"Are they?" I rejoined. Then I continued my grave discourse: "As I said, we are all

free and gay and beautiful and our faces set on pleasure. Then there is the music, the scarce-noted scents and the delicate shapes and colours of flowers, the prismatic glitter of glass, and the exhilarating snowiness of the table-linen. . . . ."

"Dave's beaming smile," added the Sphinx, referring to our waiter.

"Yes, calling up immediately all the happy dinners we have had at his table. If we were to meet him elsewhere in years to come, how his face would flash these evenings back to us! I believe I could count up the times we have been here by the wrinkles of kindness on his face."

"I wonder if he really cares about us," said the Sphinx, wistfully watching Dave as he expertly dismembered a roast duck at a side table. Presently the excellence of the duck turned her thoughts back again to our argument.

"Say what you will, with your conflux of pleasant influences," she resumed, "roast duck is the real explanation."

"Who would take you for such a materialist," said I, "to look at you there, so radiantly delicate, so shiningly spirituelle?—"

"Roast duck," laughed the Sphinx, "my spirituelle expression comes entirely of roast duck, believe me."

I could almost believe her in that moment.

"Materialist yourself!" she retorted presently. "You will force me to turn metaphysician and expound to you the mysticism of gastronomy."

"The metaphysics of duck!" I interjected.

"Precisely."

"Proceed, then," said I, and was silent.

"Well," she began, "I am perfectly serious. It is you that are the materialist, not I, for the reason that the familiarity of the process of eating blinds you to its essentially mysterious nature; that process of transmutation of gastronomic alchemy, by which food is changed into genius and beauty, and the kitchen seen to be the power-house of the soul. After all, my gastronomic theory of the soul is merely one side of the same mystery

which we see illustrated every day on another side by the doctor and the chemist. When we take a dose of medicine to tonic our nerves, we don't laugh sceptically, or even give a thought to the wonder of its operation. Yet surely it is mystery itself that distillations from plants, and tinctures drawn from stones, should hold for us the keys of life and death, and exalt or depress our immortal spirits. Have you ever thought on the marvel that an almost infinitesimal quantity of certain juices distilled from some innocent-faced meadow-flower, a mere dewdrop of harmless-looking liquid, can shatter our life out of us like a charge of dynamite? . . . ."

"A little more duck, m'm?" intervened Dave.

"The dynamics of duck," I whispered gently. "Go on."

"Well," continued the Sphinx, laughing bravely, "the operation of food is exactly the same in its nature as the operation of medicines and poisons. For some unexplained reason, medicines and poisons

influence us in certain ways. We don't know how or why, we only know that they do. The influence of wine again is a part of the same mysterious process. Why should this Rudesheimer affect us differently from this water? Any one unfamiliar with the difference between wine and water would say it was absurd. But it is true for all that — and if you admit the influence of wine, and the influence of various other foreign substances, animal, vegetable and mineral, on the human organism, in the form of medicines, stimulants, poisons and such like, you cannot logically deny the possible influence, say, of duck. Therefore, I contend once more that the harmony between us of which you spoke is a music first composed in the kitchen, transferred to notation on the menu, and finally performed by us in a skillful duet of digestion. . . . ."

"Again," added the Sphinx hastily, as I was preparing to make some comment;

"Again, you know that the intimate connection between supper and dreams is a

scientific fact. If supper produces night-dreams, why should n't lunch and dinner produce daydreams!"

"I surrender unconditionally to that," I laughed, "you have won. We owe it all to the *chef*. We are but notes in his music — 'helpless pieces of the game he plays!' "

"A little more duck, sir?" intervened Dave, once more.

"Yes, Dave, I will," said I, with emphasis.

III

ON THE WEARING OF OPALS

"HOW sad your eyes are to-night!" I said to the Sphinx a few evenings ago.

"Are they?" she smiled. "But then you know we are never so sad as our eyes."

"Are you quite sure there is nothing wrong?" I asked.

"Perfectly. . . . . I expect I have been looking too long at my opals."

After a moment she added:

"I so often think of what you said about sorrows being the opals of the soul."

"Fancy your remembering that!" said I, with mock modesty.

"It is strange," the Sphinx went on, "how sorrow continues to be associated with the opal."

"I have often marvelled at your courage

in wearing so many. They gleam on your fingers like a whole armory of sorrow."

"Is there any danger a woman would n't dare for beauty's sake? And in spite of the superstition, they are more fashionable than ever. Yet I don't think there is a woman who wears them who does not feel in her heart that she is living under the rainbow of some beautiful doom, some romantic menace. Some day the genius of the stone will touch her heart, with its wand of sorrow, and her face will suddenly become like one of her rings, mysteriously lit with pathos."

"I believe," said I, "that it is on that very account that women wear them. It is the legend of the stone that attracts them almost more than its beauty. It has for them something of the attraction of sorcery, and suggests a commerce with those occult influences which in spite of ourselves we involuntarily think of as ruling the romantic side of our lives. There is just a spice of magic about all precious stones, and, as in the old fairy tales, a certain ring was supposed to give

control over unseen powers, so even yet we unconsciously, or consciously, continue to attach superstitious significance to the wearing of a ring."

"That is true," said the Sphinx, "and any woman who wears rings with art, and not merely for indiscriminate display, sets a new ring on her finger with a certain thoughtfulness, if not hesitation. If it does not already mean something to her, it is going to mean something — and what will that meaning be! A ring that means nothing to one, however beautiful, hardly seems to belong to us. A ring is a personal possession or nothing . . . . except diamonds," the Sphinx added, laughing, some particularly fine diamonds glittering at her throat; "diamonds are like one's carriage — a part of one's *entourage*."

"They are the Three-per-Cents of Romance," said I.

"Yes; one wears diamonds as one wears shoes. They mean nothing to one individually. They are social stones, even democratic. They are impervious to association.

They are like the sun — every one loves sunlight, but no one has ever thought of sentimentally annexing the sun. The sun is not romantic. It is a wholesome, prosperous presence in our lives, but it is impossible to think of it as personally related to ourselves — whereas the moon, on the other hand, means just 'us' and no one else in the world to every romantic eye that looks up to it. The diamond is the sun of precious stones, the opal is the moon."

"But what of the pearl?"

"The pearl is the Evening Star."

"Tell me," I said, "if I may ask, do your opals stand for sorrows gone by or for sorrows to come?"

"You must n't be so literal," she answered, "one can hardly label one's sorrows like that. Sorrow is temperamental, not accidental; it is attitude rather than history; it comes even more from within than from without. Some natures attract it — as the moon draws the sea. When I speak of my sorrows I do not mean my personal history — did you

think my opals stood for so many disappointments?"

She laughed disdainfully.

"No," she continued, "few of us, alas! are real enough to achieve the distinction of a great sorrow. A great sorrow is as rare as a great work of art. To know a really beautiful sorrow of our own, one needs to have a tragic simplicity of nature which belongs only to a few chosen temperaments; and if, indeed, a beautiful sorrow should come into our lives, who knows but that we should miss its beauty in its pain! Just as we have musicians to make our music for us, we have to rely on others for our sorrows."

"It is strange how much more distinguished sorrow is than joy," said I.

"Yes; and yet I suppose it is a part of what, resist it as we may, seems to be the natural law of renunciation. The weak nature may be crushed and lowered by renunciation, but the strong nature seems to be mysteriously refined. Perhaps, indeed, it is scarcely correct to speak of a weak

nature renouncing. Things are taken from it rather than renounced. Renunciation implies will, and the exercise of strength. And thus to be able to do without implies an individual greatness and sufficiency from the beginning. We probably never renounce anything that we really need. Whatever the reason, however, there is no doubt that, as you say, the world is conscious of a certain distinction, and even romantic beauty attaching to sorrow which it does not associate with joy. Sorrow seems to imply a certain initiation into the arcana of human experience, a certain direct relation with the regent powers of our destiny, august and hidden, and only revealing their supernatural faces to this and that mortal here and there, henceforth stricken, and, so to say, 'enchanted', as one touched by the sacred lightning and yet alive among men."

"I suspect," said I, "that that is what, in a dim and trivial way, people mean when they speak of So-and-So looking 'interesting' — because they look sad or even only ill."

"No doubt. And, curious as it may sound, I don't think we are ever quite satisfied with happiness — not, at all events, till we have known sorrow. Till then, in our happiest hours, we seem to be unconsciously waiting for sorrow. Perhaps that is because we instinctively feel that the rarest forms of joy can only be ours on the conditions of sorrow. Intense, complete joy is only possible to the sorrowful temperament . . . . to the nature sensitive to the sorrow that lives in all beautiful things. . . . ."

"To the opal temperament," said I. The Sphinx smiled and continued:

"There again is another mystery. Why does sadness seem to lie at the heart of all beauty? Truth and Beauty seem indeed to be one in sadness. All the rarest types of beauty have something sad about them, some tragic look, or enigmatic wistfulness of expression, at the least a touch of loneliness. The gayest music can never be quite happy. Indeed, one might almost say that two qualities only are necessary to the highest

beauty — strangeness and sadness: perhaps we might say only one and call it world-strangeness; a look of another world than ours, a look of spiritual exile. Perhaps there is the secret of beauty — sadness. Beauty is an exile in this world, a fallen spirit, and, whatever her embodiment, be it a face, a flower, or a gem, it carries with it always its look of exile."

"Thus, again," said I, smiling, "we see why opals are more beautiful than diamonds. The diamond is the stone of this world. It has the prosperous, contented look of that brilliant, unmysterious happiness which comes of good health and a bank account. There is no sadness at the cold heart of the diamond — just as there is no sadness in this glass of champagne, and therefore no appeal to the imagination, as with the sad distinguished wines. I doubt if people who wear opals should drink champagne."

"Ah! but you see I wear diamonds, too," laughed the Sphinx.

"Yes, there you are. Always the best of both worlds. . . . ."

"True," said the Sphinx sadly, "but the best is only in one of them. . . . ."

"Truth fully now," I asked, "are you quite sure in which?"

The Sphinx refused to commit herself, but "My opals know," she answered, musingly turning them to the light.

IV

NEW LOVES FOR OLD

HOW is it," said the Sphinx one evening, "that you never bring a poem with you to dinner nowadays? Have you quite given up writing them?"

"Almost," I answered.

"But you should n't. It is lazy of you."

"I suppose," said I, "it is a kind of laziness — but I hardly think it is voluntary, or much under my control. In many ways I grow more active and industrious as I grow older. I do more work and I work more regularly. The laziness is certainly neither mental nor physical. It is rather emotional — yes! a laziness of the emotional faculties."

"You cannot mean that you have stopped falling in love?"

"I 'm inclined to think I have," I laughed; "but that, like the poetry, is only one

expression of the laziness I mean. Generally, while, as I say, I am less lazy in doing than of old, and while, as doctors would say, my mental faculties are active and unimpaired, I grow more and more lazy in feeling."

"Tell me some more. . . . ."

"Well, I mean that, while my brain grows year by year more catholic in its sympathies, and sees more clearly all the time opportunities of feeling old and new, my heart and senses seem less and less inclined to second it with any energy of enthusiasm or excitement. The beauty of the world, for example, never seemed more beautiful to me than it does now. I can see far more beauty in it than I could when I was a boy, appreciate far more its infinite variety; nor has it lost in wonder, or mystery or holiness. All this I see, and thankfully accept — but it is seldom that I am set in a fine glow, or that I fall into a dream about it. My appreciation of it is no longer rapture. Yes, I have lost rapture."

"Poor old thing!" laughed the Sphinx derisively, "but go on."

"Laugh," said I, "but it's all too true. Take another illustration: Some noble cause, some ghastly wrong, some agonising disaster. Never has my imagination been more alive to such appeals; never have they stirred me to greater aspiration, indignation or pity — mentally. But while my perceptive, imaginative side is thus more active than ever, it seems unable to set going the motive forces of feeling, as it used to do. It were as if I should say 'Oh yes! indeed, I see it all — but I'll feel about it to-morrow.' Something underneath seems to say: 'What is the use of being excited about it — of taking fire. It's noble, it's monstrous, it's pitiful — but what's the use! — feeling won't help.' To think how inspired, how savage, how wrought I should have been once — use or no use! But now. . . . ."

"Tell me about falling in love," interrupted the Sphinx, quizzically. "How does this sad state of things affect that?"

"In just the same way. I see a beautiful face, or come in contact with some romantic personality. I say to myself: 'How wonderful she is! I could spend my life looking into those strange eyes, and I am old enough to know that I should never want to look into any others.' I say to myself: 'I think I have but to set my heart on it, and that woman and I might make life a fairy tale for each other!' But I raise no hand. I am content to see the possibility, content to admire the opportunity, content to see it pass. I am too lazy even for romance."

"And so you write no more poems?"

"Yes — or very staid ones. As it happens I have brought you one to-night, which you will see is very evidently inspired by the muse of middle-age. It has an unexceptionable moral, and is entitled 'New Loves for Old.' Shall I read it?"

"Go on," said the Sphinx, and I proceeded to read the following:

" 'New Loves for Old!' I heard a pedler cry,
'New Loves for Old!' as down the street
he passed,
And from each door I noted with a sigh
How all the people ran at once to buy—
Bringing in hand the dimmed old loves
that last.

" 'New Loves for Old!' O wondrous fair and
bright
Seem the new loves against the loves
grown old,
So flower-fresh and dewy with delight,
And burning as with supernatural light—
Ah yes! the rest were tinsel—this is gold!

" 'New Loves for Old!' the pedler went his
way—
Night fell, then in my window the bright
spark
Of my old love gave out its constant ray,
'How burn the new loves that they bought
to-day?'
But all the other windows remained dark."

"Do you mean it? Is it true?" asked the Sphinx when I had finished.

"Those are nice questions for a philosopher to ask!" I laughed. "Of course, it is true

for some people, true of some lives, and for those I mean it."

"But what is your own personal feeling in the matter?"

"I hardly know if I have any personal feeling about it."

"But you wrote the poem. Why did you write it then?"

"One does n't write poems for oneself. One writes them for others. Poetry is addressed, like certain legal proclamations, to all whom it concerns. Do you remember those lines of Straton's in the Greek Anthology:

"'Love-songs I write for him and her,
Now this, now that, as Love dictates;
One birthday gift alone the Fates
Gave me, to be Love's Scrivener.'

"Of course, this is not the whole truth about the artist, but it is a good deal of it. In a sense the artist is the most unselfish of human beings, for his whole life is living for, and feeling for, others. The more lives and

the more various he can live, the greater the number and the diversity of his feelings, the greater his art. This many-mooded nature leads those who misunderstand his function frequently to cry out that he is insincere; the fact being that he is so sincere in so many different ways that to hasty observers his imaginative sympathy has the look of inconsistency."

"But come now, you need n't pretend to be so superior to our common human nature as all that! If you yourself had to choose between one of your dimmed old loves that last, and one of the peddler's brilliant novelties, which would you choose?"

"It would depend who I was at the moment."

"Oh, nonsense — be serious."

"But I am. It would depend, at all events, on what kind of love I felt most in need of at the moment — one's needs are so different from day to day. Old loves give us certain satisfactions, and new loves give us certain other satisfactions."

"Well, tell me what those different satisfactions are."

"Old Love brings you the sense of security, of shelter, of peace; it has the warm-home charm of kindly long-known things, the beauty of beautiful habit, the nimbus and the authority of religion. In fact, it has all that belongs to the word 'old' used in the laudatory sense. Its value is the value of the known — whereas the value of new love is largely the value of the unknown."

"You mean that the value of new love lies largely in its newness."

"Certainly. Mere novelty, as the world admits on every hand, has real value; the value of refreshment, at least. In fact, novelty is the truest friend of old feeling, as it makes us feel the old feelings over again — which might hardly happen without its assistance. Besides, love is even more an imaginative than an emotional need, and the new love speaks to the imagination. Love needs wonder to live on quite as much as secure affection. The new love appeals to

one's sense of strangeness, one's spirit of adventure. As we stand silent upon that peak in Darien — who knows, we say to our hushed expectant hearts, who knows but that this is Eldorado at last. . . . ."

"We only say that when the old was not Eldorado," put in the Sphinx.

"O of course!" I admitted hastily.

The Death of the Poet

THE DEATH OF THE POET

THE poet lay dying. He was not a good grey poet. Indeed, some of those who pass judgments upon complex lives, with the spontaneity of simple ignorance, would no doubt have called him the bad grey poet. Though he was hardly forty, there were already snowdrifts here and there among his thick locks.

For a long while he had known that he was soon to die. Dreams had told him, and he had seen it written on the faces that looked at him in the street. The foreknowledge did not in the least trouble him. Indeed, while he was far from being a lachrymose sentimentalist, and life had for him even more zest than when he was a boy, yet he had for some time been weary of the long battle, and the news was less the threat of death than the promise of rest.

And now the rest was coming. There was only one consideration that made him cling to life, or, rather, suddenly rouse himself to wrest a short reprieve. It was the last sentiment his numerous detractors would have believed of him. Like all really great poets, he was much in debt. Debt, indeed, had hovered like a raven, or rather a cloud of ravens, croaking over the whole course of his life. In his secret heart, and even in occasional outspoken utterance, he held that the world owed him far more than he owed it; yet it should not be said of him that he died in debt! Therefore he had girded himself up to one last tremendous orgie of creation, so that his creditors should be paid to the uttermost farthing. His friends, who knew nothing of the summons that had come to him, for he looked like living for years, marvelled at the sudden outburst of his energy. Sometimes, in a mood of fantastic irony, he would say to them, "Do you know what keeps me alive?" And he would answer, "My creditors" — to their shouts of derisive

laughter. Imagine Pagan Wasteneys giving a thought to his creditors!

But it was true for all that, as Wasteneys's familiar doctor could attest: for on one occasion Wasteneys, being taken with a sudden attack of the heart and apparently near death, had burst into tears — not at the thought of his wife, not at the thought of his two little girls, but at the thought of his creditors. After all, he was to die in debt! That thought alone obsessed him, leaving room for no other — tenderness. However, oxygen granted him still another reprieve, and once more he worked like a madman till at last he had written enough.

Then, laying down his pen upon the desk for the last time, he said, "I am ready to die."

Thereon his valet undressed him, taking away the clothes he had worn for the last time, and the poet luxuriously stretched himself in the white bed, from which no duty would ever call him to rise again.

For a long while he lay back dreamily

enjoying the thought — of his readiness to die. At last he had been able to wring from life the privilege to die.

The faces of his creditors came back to him with a positive beauty, haloed, so to speak, with this last shining achievement. Honest, true-hearted men, he felt that he should care a little to look in their faces once more and shake their hands. Indeed, he almost regretted that he had to die when he thought of their honest faces. What a beautiful world — when to the eyes of a dying poet his creditors even seem beautiful!

Presently he sent for his lawyer — who had helped him through many a difficult pass — and when the lawyer had come, he stretched out his hands to him.

"Old friend," he cried, "congratulate me. At last the bankrupt has his discharge. The court allows me to die. . . . ."

"Rubbish!" answered the lawyer; "none of your death's-head humour. But you really mean that you have finished your book? I do indeed congratulate you. . . . ."

"Yes! My last book. Unless I should be expected to write for my living in some other world, I have written my last word, dipped my pen in ink for the last time. . . . ."

The lawyer gently bantered him. "If only it were true," he said, "what good news for your readers! . . . ."

"Laugh as much as you like . . . . but you will see. A very few days will show."

"You fantastic fellow . . . . what do you mean? You know there is nothing whatever the matter with you. You cannot die without some disease, or by some accident — unless you intend to be so commonplace as to commit suicide. . . . ."

"No! none of those," answered Wasteneys, with his odd smile; "I am going to die — out of sheer weariness; and, by the way, I want you to insist upon this epitaph being engraved upon my urn: 'Pagan Wasteneys. Born 1866; bored to death — 1905.'"

"Of course I will promise no such thing," answered the lawyer.

"Well, then I must instruct some mortuary engraver myself. . . . . But tell me — you have brought with you the schedule of my debts? How much exactly do they amount to?"

The lawyer drew a bulky paper from his pocket.

"Here is the schedule," he said, and then glancing at the total of many pages of figures, he answered, "They are close on ten thousand pounds. . . . ."

" 'T is a good round sum," said the poet, "but in two years I have earned it, every penny, and more besides."

"It is marvellous," said the lawyer.

"It sounds like a dream," said the poet, "but it is true. Think what fun one might have with ten thousand pounds — if one were not going to die. . . . ."

"Or pay one's debts at last," laughed the lawyer.

" That reminds me that I have a fancy for the manner of paying them, in which I hope you will humour me. I wish to pay each credi-

tor in person, and I wish to pay him in solid gold. I would, therefore, ask you to send out a notice inviting them here at noon to-day week; that is, Wednesday week — I shall not die till Friday."

Though he was quite serious, the poet could not help laughing at this final touch, and the lawyer joined in. "You humbug!" he exclaimed; but, for all that, the poet was able to convince him of his seriousness after a while.

"I would have them pass before me one by one, as I lie propped up on pillows on my death-bed, and I shall expect each one first to bend down and kiss my hand. Then a clerk will call out his name in a loud voice, and the amount of the debt, and another clerk shall weigh out to him the amount in gold. . . . . I intend it to be a kind of triumphal lying in state. But we can discuss the exact details later. I feel a little tired. The shadows are already weighing down my eyelids . . . ." and the poet laughed again his sad sinister laugh; though, indeed, it was

true enough, as the lawyer, looking at him, could not fail to note.

"Good-night, old friend," said the poet; "come and see me again tomorrow;" and, when the lawyer had gone, he once more stretched himself out in the bed, luxuriously murmuring the lines he had murmured nightly for so many years:

> " If rest be sweet at close of day
> For tired hands and tired feet,
> How good at last to rest for aye —
> If rest be sweet."

The lying in state, as the poet grimly called it, was conducted exactly as he had conceived it. At first the lawyer had protested that to expect your honest English tradesman to bow the knee and kiss the hand of one of his debtors was out of the question.

"Take my word, friend," said the poet, "when a tradesman is going to be paid a debt he had given up for lost, he will not be particular as to the manner in which he receives it. Indeed, he will be so thankful for it that it will be a natural impulse to fall upon his

knees . . . . And if they demur," he added, laughing his half-boyish, half-wicked, and quite creepy laugh, "tell them that it is the fancy of a dying man."

When the noon of Wednesday came, the poet lay in his great bed awaiting his creditors. There had only been a week since his talk with his lawyer, but even that good-natured sceptic had come to admit the truth of his client's prediction. No one could look on that weary form stretched so straight and slim under the clothes, or upon that worn ivory face, so worn and yet so strangely smiling, without reading the unmistakable signs.

"Do you believe it now?" said the poet to his lawyer. "It is only a jest — you must not take it too seriously. It is only death. Don't be unhappy, old friend. I wish I could make you know how good it feels — to be dying."

Then a little soft-voiced clock chimed twelve times.

"Now for the fun . . . . " said the poet,

looking up to his friend, with his eyes filled with laughter.

It had been his whim to have his room draped in purple, and over his bed hung a great wreath of laurel still in flower. At one side of the large room was a table also covered in purple, on which were arranged twelve great pyramids of gold pieces, and on two other tables close by were two large bags of orange-coloured leather overflowing with silver.

As the clock chimed twelve, two footmen clad in a livery of dull-gold silk, with sprigs of laurel worked upon the collars of their coats, threw open the folding doors of the spacious room, and a crowd of awed and almost sepulchral English tradesmen entered in a hushed and timorous fashion. They were dressed appropriately, as for a funeral, and a few of them wore crape round their hats. They trod softly, like butlers, and were evidently a good deal overawed and indeed frightened.

And in truth it was a scene calculated to astonish. For as they entered, there facing them in the middle of the room lay Wasteneys,

with his eyes closed and his hands crossed, and the great laurel wreath over his head; and to his right, at one side of the room, stood the table heaped with gold, which glittered still more brightly beneath the beams of twelve immense candlesticks. If anything could gleam brighter, it was the eyes of the creditors, whose expression was a mixture of gaping astonishment at the piled-up gold and hushed wonder at the white distinguished figure in the bed.

When they were seated on the gilded Empire chairs provided for them, a secretary clad in black rose from a seat by the dying man's side and read a brief salutation, in which Pagan Wasteneys, a poet of the realm of England, desired upon his death-bed to thank in person those honourable mercers and general purveyors who had for so many years shown him so great a consideration in respect of certain moneys which he owed them, in exchange for certain necessities of existence — among which necessities luxuries, of course, were included. Mr. Wasteneys desired to

add that his delay to satisfy these obligations had come of no wilful neglect on his part, but had been occasioned by the many sorrows — not to speak of the many expenses — incident to the profession of a poet. He had invited them to meet him for the last time in this way that he might personally express his gratitude to them — at the same moment that he satisfied his indebtedness, with compound interest at five per cent.

As the secretary concluded with this eloquent peroration, Wasteneys opened his eyes for the first time, and raised his head from the pillow, with a weary attempt at a bow, and motioned with his hand toward the company — his hand thereafter lying white and fragile on the side of the bed. For a moment a smile flickered over his lips, but only his lawyer observed it, and, next moment, he was gravely prepared for the conclusion of the ceremony.

Presently a clerk dressed in a prim costume of the finest broadcloth rose and called out the name of Peter Allardyce, vintner — the

names of the creditors being called out in alphabetical order — at the same time naming the sum of £763.19.7 as due to him, inclusive of interest at five per cent. At the summons, a shy, ruddy man of country build rose from his chair, and being led by one of the footmen to the dying man's side, bent down and kissed the frail hand on the coverlet. Wasteneys acknowledged the courtesy with a tired smile, and Mr. Allardyce was then conducted by the footman to the table piled with gold, where another clerk, also dressed in broadcloth, like his fellow, weighed out to him the amount of his debt, pouring the bright gold into a great bag of purple leather.

"William Dimmock," once more cried out the first clerk, "livery-stable keeper, for carriage-hire, the sum of £378.10.3, inclusive of interest at five per cent."

A lean, horsy little man thereon rose from his chair and went through the same ceremony as his predecessor, retiring also with a great bag of purple leather bursting with gold pieces.

And so the odd ceremony proceeded. It would be tedious to follow it through its details; though one may observe that of all the creditors that followed, the heaviest were Peter Markham, florist, and Jasper Dyce, jeweller, for flowers and gems lavished by the dying man on forgotten women.

When it was all over, and Wasteneys was left alone with his lawyer and his physician, he buried his face in the pillows, and laughed as if his heart would break — laughed indeed so violently that his physician had to warn him that such mirth was dangerous in his present state — unless, indeed, he wished to die of laughter.

"No, indeed," said Wasteneys; "I have other farewells to make. But, O was n't it delicious! And think of it — like the village blacksmith, I owe not any man! What honest, kind fellows they were! I am so glad to have seen them before I die."

"You must see no one else to-day," said his physician, presently, "if you wish to make those other farewells."

"I have still to-morrow and most of Friday. I shall go out, like Falstaff, 'even at the turning of the tide,' " he said, laughing softly at himself, as he had done all his life, and repeating to himself the phrase that had romantically touched his fancy — "even at the turning of the tide! . . . . even at the turning of the tide!"

"What am I dying of, doctor?" he said, presently.

"I can see no reason why you should be dying at all," answered the physician, "unless it is pure whim."

"Perhaps it is partly that," said the poet, "but I think it is chiefly because — I have lived. To live longer would be mere repetition. I have just enjoyed the last new experience life had to give me — and I almost think it was the most wonderful of all. It was the last touch of romance needed to complete a romantic life — to have paid my debts! You are right. That was indeed enough excitement for one day. I will sleep now — the happiest man in the world."

He had hardly finished speaking before he had fallen into one of those sudden deep sleeps that come and go fitfully with the dying. He lay on his back, his hands crossed, and a smile of infinite serenity and thankfulness on his face. Over his head hung the great laurel wreath, still in flower. . . . .

Still in flower!

"It is strange that he should choose so deliberately to die — for he has still a great future in store for him," said the physician to himself as he went out, giving on his way certain instructions to the nurse-in-waiting.

The physician, like the majority of human beings, confounded the length of a man's life with the success of it — as was, perhaps, peculiarly natural in a man whose business was the lengthening of human existence. To die before sixty was to him a form of failure, and he himself, already sixty-three, was still, with childish eagerness, pursuing certain prizes, professional and social, at which Wasteneys would indeed have smiled. He dreamed, for instance, of a knighthood.

Now one of Wasteneys's great fears had been that he should not be in a position to die before he was knighted. That had in some degree accounted for the fury of his production during the last two years. He would not indeed have disdained to have been made a lord, but that necessitated living so much longer, and writing so many more words — and really it was not worth it. He regarded his life as completed — at least to his own satisfaction. To take it up again would be to begin an entirely new career. Already, as rich men are said to go through two or three fortunes, Wasteneys had run through three careers. Three seemed enough. He had won all the prizes he cared for. The rest could only be humorous. So, "Good-bye, proud world; I'm going home!"

Next morning, when his toilet had been made for him by the beautiful nurse-in-waiting and his faithful man servant, Wasteneys received his physician and his lawyer; and then, as the little clock chimed the hour of noon, he said:

"It is time for me to begin my farewells."

He made it evident that he wished to be alone, except for his own friend the lawyer. So, when the two were left together in the room, he turned to the lawyer and said:

"Dear friend, bring me the Beautiful Face . . . ." adding, "the key is here under my pillow."

Taking the key, the lawyer unlocked an old cabinet in a shadowy corner of the room, and presently returned to the bedside, carrying in his hands a small urn of exquisite workmanship. Placing it on a low table near to the poet's hand, the lawyer, who had been the confidant of the poet's tragedy, made a sign of understanding, and left the room.

On the wall facing the end of the poet's bed had hung for seven years the picture of a marvellously beautiful girl. She was so exceptional in her beauty that to attempt description of her would be futile. Suffice it that her face — framed in night-black hair, and tragically lit by enormous black

eyes — was chiefly remarkable for the nobility of its expression and for its sense of elemental power. It was a face full of silence — a dark flower of a face, so to say, rooted deep down in the mysterious strengths of nature. If one may use such an expression of a thing so delicate, she seemed like a rock of beauty, against which a whole world of men might dash their tribute hearts in vain. Other faces might seem more attractive, more formally beautiful, but to few faces had it been given to concentrate the cold imperialism of beauty as it was concentrated in this exquisite face.

This face was the real meaning of the poet's life. The rest was mere badinage, screening a sad heart. This face was the real meaning of the poet's gladness at his approaching death. This life held no more expectations for him — but the next? Who knows? — perhaps to-morrow night he would be with her in Paradise.

Looking long at the picture of the Beautiful Face, he turned — to the Beautiful Face

itself; for it had now been silver dust for four years. Drawing the urn to him, he read once more the name upon the little gold plate let into the bronze:

Meriel Wasteneys: Died March 16, 1900.

And underneath the name he read some lines inscribed in gold:

"O Beauty, art thou also dust?
These silver ashes — can it be
That you, thus silting through my hand,
Once made a madman out of me!"

"And a madman still," he added, laughing sadly to himself.

Then raising the lid of the urn, he looked in. The white ash filled but half the little urn. Gently thrusting in his hand, he let the ashes sift through his long fingers over and over again, and as he did so he gazed at the Beautiful Face upon the wall. . . . .

After a while he replaced the lid upon the urn, and lay back with closed eyes — thinking of it all.

Presently the lawyer returned softly into

the room, and fancying him asleep, was about to leave again, but Wasteneys had heard him.

"Is that you?" he said. "Come to me. I have said good-bye. You know where my ashes are to lie."

The lawyer assented, locking the urn once more in the cabinet, and bringing the key back again to Wasteneys. The little urn, as I have said, was as yet only half filled.

The two friends sat silent together for a long time, saying nothing, for there was nothing to say. Both knew all.

After a while the poet turned to his friend. "Will you ask Isabel, my wife, to come to me?" he said. And presently there entered the room a woman so fragilely beautiful that she seemed to be made of moonbeams. She was indeed, compared to the Beautiful Face on the wall, as the moon to the sun. That, alas! had been her place in the poet's life. She had been the moon to the Beautiful Face. And yet, in his strange way, the poet had always loved her, deep down ——

"Very deep down!" she used to say sometimes, with a sad smile.

As she came and sat beside him, he took her face tenderly in his hands, and looked and looked into her fairy blue eyes without a word. A curiously lined face it was for so young a woman — all beautiful silver lines filled with delicate refinements of thought and feeling. "Suffering," said the ignorant world, attributing these silver lines to the unfaithfulness of the poet. Yet, as a matter of fact, Isabel's face had been hardly less lined when she was twenty. The poet and the years together had barely added half a dozen lines. In fact, nature had seemed to intend, when making Isabel's face, to show that beauty is something more than velvet skin and dreamy eyes and rounded contours; to prove that nothing is needed for the making of a beautiful face but — light. Isabel's face, indeed, seemed made of light. The lines in it were like rays of brightness, and her eyes like deep springs of purest radiance.

There was, after all, something in Isabel's

face that the poet had seen only there, something "fairy" that he had never ceased loving better than anything else in the world. But Life had had its way with them. Strong currents beyond the control of either had torn them apart, brought them together again, and then again torn them apart. Still, they had never really lost faith in each other's natures, and though an impertinent world had misunderstood their mutual forbearance, they had never misunderstood each other.

"Isabel!" said the poet, still holding her face like a star in his hands, "I am going to die, and I have called you to congratulate me — as I know so wise a girl will. For we both know, better than any one, that it is best."

Isabel's eyes filled with tears, and releasing her face from his hands, she buried it in the bedclothes. Presently mastering her feeling, she raised her head again, and looking with infinite pity into the poet's eyes, she said:

"O my dear boy — cannot you be human

at last: just once before you die? I have always thought of you like some Undine, a beautiful, gentle, elemental being — lacking only a human soul. Indeed, sometimes I have thought of you as a god — sitting aloof from our little every day interests — but God knows I have loved you all the time, and you only shall I love in all my life. . . . ."

The poet once more took her face in his hands, and looking into her nereid eyes, he said: "Wife, dear wife — forgive the sorrow I have brought you. If there was any joy, remember that. Life is very difficult, very strange. It was all no fault of ours, not even mine. I see it now very clearly — now that I am dying. I see how wrong I have been — I see how right. I see how right you have been — I see how wrong. Let us forgive each other. Let us be in love again before I die. Give me your eyes. Let me kiss them once before I die. . . . ."

Then, a sudden thought taking him, "I wonder, dear," he said, "if you can find my "Euripides." There is a passage I am thinking

of in 'The Alcestis.' It would comfort me to hear it again. . . . ."

Presently his wife brought him the volume, and turning over the pages, the poet at last found the passage he was in search of.

"Yes! this is it," he said:

" '*Now have I moored my bark of life in a happier haven than before, and so will own myself a happy man.*' "

Then leaning back on his pillow, "Tell me Isabel," he said, "why is there so mysterious a comfort in words?"

"Alas! dear, it is for you to tell me," she said, stroking his hair; "you have loved words so well — and made so many beautiful words."

"I know you think that I have loved nothing but words," said the poet; "I wonder if it is true? . . . . I think not."

"I think you meant to love life as well," she answered, kissing his brow gently.

She smoothed his hair a long while as they sat in silence together — the past rolling over them like a river.

Presently Wasteneys broke the silence. "I have walked in a vague course!" he said — "walked in a vague course! . . . . if you will forgive," he added, presently, "my quoting once more. A dying man should not quote. He is expected to say something original. Well, I will try to-morrow . . . ."

Then there fell over him once more that ante-lethal drowsiness of death, and murmuring again, "I have walked in a vague course!" he fell asleep.

When she was sure he was asleep, his wife bent over him and kissed his lips.

"After all," she said, "he has never grown up. He is a baby still — just a child, that is all. . . . ."

Wasteneys awoke after a little while, to find himself alone, save for the silent presence of his lawyer.

"I fell asleep," he said, "foolishly enough — for I have little time to waste; and I shall soon have all the sleep I want. . . . ." Then, after a pause, he added: "I wish to say

good-bye to my little girls. Will you have them brought to me?"

Presently there entered the room two beautiful children, one about twelve years old, and the other five. They came hand in hand, laughing, and ran across to their father's bed, gleefully ignorant of the significance of the still room, and the purple hangings, and the white figure in the bed.

"Daddy! daddy!" they cried, climbing upon the bed. "What a time it is since we saw you! . . . . Tell us a story right away."

The father took the long brown-gold curls of the elder girl in his hands, and stroked the sunshine head of the little one. "Kiddies," he said, after a while, "your daddy is going on a long journey. Will you think of him and love him while he is gone?"

"Where are you going, daddy?" asked the two young voices.

"O ever so far! It 's a country called 'East of the Sun and West of the Moon.' "

"O take us with you, daddy. It sounds such a lovely place."

"I cannot take you with me, kiddies — but perhaps mother and you and I will meet there one of these days . . . . if we 're all very good!"

"I wish we could go with you now, daddy," said the elder girl; and the younger, out of sheer reverence for her elder sister, repeated her.

"I wish we could go with you now, daddy," she said.

"No," said the father; "you must stay behind and look after Little Mother. She would be so lonely without you."

The children, with the volatility of their age, accepted this explanation, and presently once more turned to their father with a demand for a story.

"No!" he said; "it is your turn to tell me a story. I am tired to-day. You, Pervenche, must say for me 'The Three Kings,' and you, Golla, must say 'The White Bird.' I have n't heard you say them for quite a

long time. And each standing up in turn, like a corporal saluting his captain, Pervenche and Golla recited their little pieces; and as they recited, the tears rolled down their father's cheeks.

"You are crying, daddy," suddenly exclaimed the little one. "What are you crying for?"

The poet was crying because, among all the many human experiences he had missed, he had missed his children too.

Their nurse near at hand rescued him from the dilemma. "Daddy is tired," she said; "bid him good-bye. . . . ."

And, wonderingly, the little creatures obeyed; but the tiny Golla, already a sturdy sceptic, kept asking, when they were once more in the nursery, "I wonder why daddy cried!"

When his little girls had gone, Wasteneys turned to his lawyer.

"What time is high tide to-day?"

He asked the question wearily, almost querulously; for, after all, he was seriously dying.

"I will look in the newspaper," said the lawyer; and having looked, he answered, "At three minutes past four."

"When will the tide turn?" asked the dying poet.

"It keeps at full for perhaps a quarter of an hour, and then begins to ebb."

"That gives us from now about four hours," said the poet. "Four hours. At the turning of the tide. Four hours . . . . and then!"

Wasteneys lay still after this, with his eyes closed.

Presently he roused himself. "I have one more farewell to make," he said; "will you ask them to bring me my children? . . . ."

"Your children?" The lawyer, good friend as he was, did not at first understand.

"Yes! My children. Please have them bring me my children."

Wasteneys's servant, happening to come into the room at the moment, beckoned the lawyer, and explained his master's meaning.

"Yes!" answered the lawyer, soothingly,

after this informatory pause, "they shall be brought to you."

Then presently there entered two men servants carrying two high piles of books. Placing them on a table, they left the room, returning in a few moments with two more piles. Once more they went out and returned, their arms still laden with books.

Meanwhile a new life seemed suddenly to have animated the poet's frame. His eyes shone, and he struggled to raise himself in the bed. The lawyer packed the pillows at his back, and he sat up.

"Put them at the end of the bed," he said; "let me see them all, let me touch them. . . . ."

When his wish had been carried out, and the servants departed, he leaned over the books and stroked them affectionately again and again.

"So you are really mine — really my children," he said.

"Did I really write them?" he said, presently, turning to his friend. "So many?"

"Yes! dear friend, you wrote them all," answered the lawyer, too solemnised to jest; for he saw that it was close on the turning of the tide.

"How many are there?" asked Wasteneys, leaning back, already weary with the excitement.

"I will count them. . . . ." said his friend, and presently announced that there were fifty-three volumes.

"Fifty-three!" exclaimed Wasteneys; "and how old am I?"

"Thirty-nine, next month," said the lawyer.

"Next month!" said the poet.

Then he turned again to his friend.

"Read me a page here and there," he said; "I will be my own critic. Even a critic at the point of death may be expected to tell the truth. Read to me that I may know before I die that something in all those fifty-three volumes may perhaps be worth while."

"What shall I read?" asked the lawyer.

"Read me 'What of the Darkness?' "

And the lawyer read:

"What of the Darkness? Is it very fair?
Are there great calms, and find ye silence there?
Like soft-shut lilies, all your faces glow
With some strange peace our faces never know,
With some great faith our faces never dare,
Dwells it in Darkness? Do ye find it there?

"Is it a Bosom where tired heads may lie?
Is it a Mouth to kiss our weeping dry?
Is it a Hand to still the pulse's leap?
Is it a Voice that holds the runes of sleep?
Day shows us not such comfort anywhere—
Dwells it in Darkness? Do ye find it there?

"Out of the day's deceiving light we call—
Day that shows man so great, and God so small,
That hides the stars, and magnifies the grass—
O is the Darkness too a lying glass?
Or, undistracted, do ye find truth there?
What of the Darkness? Is it very fair?"

"Are you quite sure that I wrote that?" asked the poet. "Look carefully. Is it really my book?"

"It is, indeed. Printed when you were twenty."

"I am so happy," said the poet — "so happy to think I wrote that. Time itself cannot rob me of that."

Very soon it was plainly to be seen that the poet was on the very border-line of life and death.

"Is there no one you would care to see?" asked the lawyer, gently.

"No, no one," answered the poet.

"Not your physician?" asked the lawyer.

"O no, indeed," answered the poet, with a flash of his odd smile. "Give him my love. But tell him that I want to die — not to be killed."

"What time is it?" he asked, presently.

"Five minutes to four."

The poet lay silent a while, and then he turned to his lawyer with the look of an old friendship. Indeed, his friendship for his lawyer, was, odd as it may sound, one of the realities of his unearthly life.

"Friend," he said, "I am afraid it is almost

time for us also to say good-bye. God bless you — for all. Look after — them, won't you?" and he waved his hand toward his wife's quarters. "Good-bye. . . . ."

"But," said his friend, "will you have no one with you?"

"Don't you hear the turning of the tide?" answered the poet.

"No one?" reiterated the lawyer, agonised out of his professional demeanour.

"No one!" answered Wasteneys, rising commandingly in his bed, and sweeping his hand across the volumes at its foot — "No one — but my children!"

The Butterfly of Dreams

THE BUTTERFLY OF DREAMS

IT WAS said that a tragic disappointment accounted for young Lord Laleham's curious passion for butterflies. Actually there was no such explanation, or, of course, any need of it; but pursuits out of the common naturally demand uncommon excuses — for the common mind; and it was evident to the watchful critics of Lord Laleham's career that nothing short of a great sorrow could have driven him to so trivial a means of alleviation. According to others, this dainty passion — which might well have subjected him to the contempt of his fellows, had he not been able to give a somewhat formidable physical account of himself — was to be put down as due to one of those strains of freakishness liable to break out in old families. No one, of course, dreamed that Laleham could care for butterfly-hunting for its own

sake, except those entomologists for whom his collection was famous throughout the world, authoritative, classical; for Lord Laleham was one of the handsomest and richest of young English peers, and as difficult for match-making mothers to catch as one of his own butterflies — surely the last man in the world to seek the humble laurel of the lepidopterist.

And, indeed, it was true that butterflies were something more to Laleham than entomology. They were rather a poetic than a scientific passion. There was a strong vein of the mystic and poetic in his nature to which in some way, mysterious even to himself, these strange little painted things had from childhood appealed. As the smallest boy, he had proved himself a passionist of the solitudes of nature, by lone woodland truancies and long tramps through that gipsy wilderness, which England, with all its lawns and market-gardens and nurseries, has so remarkably preserved. And, from the first moment that he found himself alone, hushed and

watching and listening, and a little afraid, in the belt of mighty beeches that was perhaps the chief honour of his pedigree, there had seemed a spell, an enchantment, over these lonely leaves, these gnome-like shapes of mottled bole, and these twisted roots that seemed to have become so through some mysterious agonies of ancient torture — though indeed, to most folk there was nothing there but leaves and the famous Laleham covers.

He had never forgotten the day when that spell of exquisite silence and dappled sunshine — the whole woodland with its finger on its lip — had suddenly become embodied in a tiny shape of coloured velvet wings that came floating zig-zag up the dingle, swift as light, aery as a perfume, soft and silent as the figured carpet in some Eastern palace. With what awe he watched it, as at length it settled near him on a sunlit weed, with what a luxury of observation his eyes noted its sumptuous unearthly markings, and what an image of wonder and exquisite mystery it there and forever left upon his mind. In a moment it

was up and away upon its uncharted travel through the wood. Instinctively, he ran in pursuit. But it was too late. He had lost his first butterfly.

For Laleham, from that moment, all the beauty of the world, and the mystery and the elusiveness of it, were symbolised in a butterfly. From that moment it seemed to him that the success of life was — the catching of a certain butterfly.

He was now thirty years old and had caught many butterflies, caught them in every part of the world, and the adventures he had met with in the apparently insignificant chase, were they to be written, would fully justify the defence he sometimes made of what the world called his whimsical hobby. "You must not look upon my butterflies as trivial," he would say. "The study of much smaller things has made modern science; and a butterfly may well lead you to the ends of the earth — and even lose you among the stars. You never know where it may take you.

There is no hunting more full of exciting possibilities. If you dare follow a butterfly, you dare go anywhere; and no quarry will lead you into stranger places, or into such beautiful unexpected adventures."

At thirty he was still unmarried. Life was still for him a lonely woodland, through which he chased the one butterfly he had never been able to capture. The butterflies of the world were in his marvellously arranged cabinets, — rainbow upon rainbow of classified wings — but one butterfly was not there. The butterfly, indeed, might possibly have been had by exchange with other collectors, though it was one so rare, and so beyond equivalent in any form, that the man who had been fortunate enough to come into possession of it seldom cared to part with it.

Besides, though occasionally Laleham had resorted to this means of supplying a missing species, it was a course he seldom took. Nearly every butterfly in his vast flower-garden of shimmering wings had been caught by his own hand. There was no country in

the world he had not visited in his determined dream of being, one might say, the Balzac of the butterfly; and it was only the commoner sort of butterfly he had occasionally obtained by exchange. The butterfly that was missing from his collection he made it a point of honour, and indeed, in course of time, a sort of superstition, to capture for himself. To the ordinary and non-entomological observer, untouched by Laleham's mystic passion, there would seem little enough to account for his preoccupation in the quite insignificant object of it, a tiny blue butterfly, to ordinary eyes not differing from any other tiny blue butterfly, and in fact only to be known for what it was by a mystic marking almost imperceptible, hidden beneath its wings. Not even the collector himself could be sure of what he was pursuing, on account of the butterfly's resemblance to another species comparatively common, exactly like, except for that hidden signature, that distinguishing hall-mark. If one were to depreciate the value of this illustrious insect, and say that its

sole distinction was that of rarity, the collector would only smile, and could afford to, perhaps. Rarity! only rarity! Was not that enough! Had not mankind agreed, throughout recorded history, that rarity alone, unaccompanied by any other precious characteristic, is of all qualifications, the qualification of immortality; and is not rarity of all values the ideal value, a value not measurable by the eye, or any method of external judgment, a value of the soul. Besides, what are the highest prizes in any chase or contest whatsoever — a simple wreath of laurel, the antlers of a deer, objects in themselves only symbolically valuable. Why, therefore, should not the ambitious pursuing spirit of man stake its fortunes on a butterfly — for what could be more typical of its own wandering course and ever changing goal.

The Laleham butterfly, as it is now called, and as not seldom happens with other rare things in nature — this being, I may add, not the least of nature's mysterious whims — had

never been found except in one remote corner of England, a fenny country producing a hardly less rare variety of flowering rush on which its caterpillar alone could feed. It was a country of boundless marshy levels, and peaty solitudes, a country of herons, and long dark-eyed pools, which, flashing every few yards under the boundless sky, filled the loneliness with magic mirrors. For the gay it was a dreary land, but for those who have found "nought so sweet as melancholy" it was melancholy only as great music is melancholy, and its loneliness was that of some splendid raven-haired widow with her tragic gaze upon the sky. It was a thinly populated region, with here and there an inn and a few cottages taking shelter under the wing of some mouldering grange. It was, in short, one of the sad beautiful ends of the earth. Here it was, and here alone, that Laleham's butterfly had chosen to dwell, to secret itself, indeed, as though in a place so remote it might hope to preserve its fragile aristocratic race from extinction. Yet, though it

was known to inhabit this solitude, not a dozen living people had ever seen it, and only two had caught it for many years; for there again it illustrated another mystery of nature, the persistent survival of a rare type, in such unchangeably small numbers as almost to risk extinction, as it were, for the purpose of aristocracy. For at least two hundred years, as long as it had been known at all, the Laleham butterfly had existed apparently in the same small family, only propagating itself sufficiently to keep its race and name upon the earth, and no more. It had not become rare by process of extinction, but because nature apparently had made few of it from the beginning. Happily this aristocratic law of nature is not only applied to butterflies. In fact one might justly say the same of the family that had dwelt in an old embattled house which had stood here sinking deeper and deeper into the solitude since the days of Richard II. Noctorum, the house was called, as was the cluster of cottages around it — a name appropriately dark and

mysterious, like the cry of owls at night across the fen.

In this old house of Noctorum, which had been built by his ancestors and inhabited by Fantons ever since, lived studious old Sir Gilbert Fanton, Baronet, alone most of the year round with his gout and his books, and one beautiful daughter hardly yet a woman. A young wife, dead now many years, had left him with two sons, both soldiers, and therefore seldom at home, and one great-eyed little girl, who, far from finding the solitude of her life irksome, had taken kindly to it, and had more and more, year by year, seemed to embody the solemn beauty of her melancholy surroundings. Laleham had been a friend of young Christopher Fanton's at Oxford, and had, several years before, come down to Noctorum with the young soldier in quest of the butterfly which was the legendary glory of the district.

Though Sir Gilbert was a much older man than himself, he had found in him a scholar with mystic tendencies similar to his own,

and, when the sons had gone to the wars, Laleham continued to come down to visit the father, and incidentally to pursue the quest of his butterfly. Then he had taken a trip about the world, visiting the tropical haunts of his hobby, which had lasted so long that when again he returned to England it had been three years since he had visited his old friend. Besides, he had once more returned from his pilgrimage without that mystic butterfly which continued still to evade his persevering pursuit. In every part of the world he had sought it, but still, so far as he could hear, the one place in which it might be found was the marshes of Noctorum. So, thinking less of his quest than of his friend, he determined to run down and see what progress Sir Gilbert was making with his great book on the folk-lore of the fens — for fairies and hobgoblins were Sir Gilbert's particular substitute for idleness. He found Sir Gilbert boyishly happy over his recent discovery of an indigenous and heretofore unrecorded variant of the story of Cupid and Psyche.

"Think of it!" exclaimed the old scholar, "here in this land of clods and pitchforks, uncouth in form indeed, but still the old dainty fancy, the old Greek fairy tale in homespun. Is n't it strange how these frail shapes of story, frail as moonbeams, are still hardy enough to make their way from land to land, and take on the disguises of the peoples, rough or gentle, among which, like a thistledown, they happen to settle."

"Yes!" answered Laleham smiling, "they are like the butterflies of the imagination — frail but indestructible."

Sir Gilbert laughed at this reminder that there were other hobbies than his own.

"Forgive me," he said, "I am afraid I am selfishly riding my own hobby; and in my Psyche, forgetting yours. Tell me about your Psyche."

Laleham shook his head, and proceeded to tell of his varying fortune in foreign lands, and how he had come back with all the butterflies of the world, except the one butterfly.

Sir Gilbert gave him the sympathy of a fellow collector.

"But surely," he said, "you have n't given up the chase — at your age."

"Almost," answered Laleham, "I am too old. The wildest enthusiasm — for butterflies — can hardly outlive thirty. I think I shall take up some serious study — like yours.

Both the friends laughed, and Sir Gilbert said:

"But, seriously, I have heard of your butterfly having been seen within a mile or two from here no longer than a week ago. There were two fellows staying at the inn last month who called to see me, enthusiasts like yourself, and they were positive that they had seen it over by the Black Ditches — of course, you know the place. But they missed it, all the same."

"The worst of the beast is," said Laleham, "that you cannot be sure, so to say, that it is itself till you have it in your hand. The other brute is so like it."

"Yet you were once sure enough, dear friend," answered Sir Gilbert.

"True," said Laleham sadly, "but who knows, I may have been wrong."

"Anyhow, here you are," said Sir Gilbert, "in the best season of the year. You never had a better opportunity. If you don't catch your butterfly this time, you never will. This is your home, you know, and you know too that I shall treat you with no ceremony. You can go about your butterflies, and I shall go about my fairies, and if I seem to neglect you, Mariana will make up for me."

Mariana entered at that moment, and stood by her father. When Laleham had last seen her hers were still those reluctant feet of maidenhood of which the great poet has sung. Now she was a woman; a very young woman, it is true, but a woman. That grave beauty of the melancholy fens, of which I have spoken as having "passed into her face," was there now in a still more decided presence. Her hair was black as English hair seldom is,

her skin was an exquisite olive, and her eyes were like those strange pools which flashed darkly in the evening light outside the library window. Her black eyelashes were so thick that you could not help thinking of them as rushes guarding the secrecies of the strange mirrors inside. And, not externally only did she seem the very embodiment of her surroundings, but her spirit seemed also to have absorbed their passionate silence. Perhaps no landscape says so little, and is yet so richly eloquent, as the elegiac landscape of a fen country. How beyond all speech is its silence, how beyond the shallow spectacular changes of showier natural effects is its solemn art of imperturbability. Mariana was strangely silent — but indeed not speechless. The lesson of the nature about her seemed to have entered into her whole being, the lesson that such silence must only be broken by very significant, very beautiful, words — as though silence were an exquisite unsullied sky only now and again to be interrupted by stars.

Laleham had observed her but little on his former visits, for, as I have said, she was hardly more than a child; and, besides, was it the cloud of his butterflies, or was it some other unforgotten face that veiled for him the faces of women, so that all these years he had passed unscathed through all the battalions of beautiful faces. Be that as it may, it was on the occasion of this visit that he saw the beauty of Mariana Fanton for the first time, and, as the days went by, he found that beauty making an even stronger appeal to his imagination, which, as always is the case with such natures as his, lay very near to his heart. As Sir Gilbert had 'threatened,' it was on Mariana that he had to rely for companionship on those days when he was not out alone with his net across the fens; for Sir Gilbert was so hard at work upon a paper for the Folk-Lore Society on his recent discovery that he could only spare his evenings for his friend. As his visit lengthened into weeks, the days he spent alone grew less, and the days he spent with Mariana

grew more, and the butterfly remained uncaught. Sometimes Mariana would go hunting it with him, but oftener they would go out on long aimless walks together, saying little, but always coming nearer and nearer through that language of expressive silence which both had been born to speak and understand. When Mariana did speak, what a heavenly animation swept its sunlight over her face; but her silence, as someone has said of her, was like a sky full of stars.

Laleham's stay at Noctorum was nearing its end. So far as his old friend was concerned, he could, of course, have stayed there forever.

"If I were you," said Sir Gilbert, "I would not leave this place till I had caught it."

"The continued presence of such a determined huntsman might frighten it from the district altogether," answered Laleham. "I will use stratagem, let it rest in security a while, and come again."

It was the hour after dinner when the friends usually smoked their pipes together,

and Sir Gilbert was genuinely sorry to lose his friend, but the proofs of his pamphlet on Cupid and Psyche had just arrived by the evening post, and his fingers were itching to open them. Besides, Laleham was to be with them yet a day or two longer. Presently Sir Gilbert's proofs became irresistible, and turning to his friend he said:

"Do you mind, old man, but I am just dying to look at these silly proofs of mine — pride of authorship, you know — suppose you look up Mariana — she is out there, I see, on the veranda — and talk astronomy to her for a few minutes. Then we can have a talk. . . . . "

"With all my heart," said Laleham, laughing as he opened the door on to the starlit veranda, and left the old man to himself.

As Laleham took a chair by Mariana's side, her recognition of his presence would have been imperceptible to anyone who did not understand her language of silence. Her eyes remained fixed on the stars, and he sat down near her without attempting even to

join her reverie. He was well content to look at her and know that she was near. Presently, without turning her head, with her eyes still among the stars, she said in her curious deep sudden voice:

"You have not found your butterfly?"

"No."

"Do you still hope to find it?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever seen it?"

"Yes."

"How often?"

"Twice."

"Twice!" she exclaimed, at length turning and looking at him. "Twice! and you lost it both times. . . . ."

Before he could answer, she raised her hand to the stars. "Look!" she said. "I sometimes think that the soul is like a butterfly, and that it goes from star to star, as a butterfly goes from flower to flower . . . ." then, with another of her sudden, and often disconcerting, transitions, she turned again to Laleham:

"Will you tell me about those times you saw your butterfly?" she said.

"It is an odd story," Laleham began, "and I am afraid you may think me superstitious. But you must n't think that it accounts for my butterflies, for I have loved them, for some unexplained reason, since I was a boy. . . . ."

"Perhaps," he added, "some tastes are prophetic;" and then he went on. "The first time I saw it was one morning about eight years ago. I was hunting it among country similar to this, and suddenly it rose out of a bed of reeds. It was so near me that I made sure it was mine, so sure that I was in no haste to strike with my net, but watched it and studied it a while, was quite carelessly certain of it in fact . . . . and then, just as I held my net ready to capture it, away it went on the wind, not quite out of sight, but always keeping a coquettish distance, near enough to lure me on, far enough away to escape. . . . ."

"It rather served you right for being so sure, did n't it?" said Mariana.

"You see I was only a young butterfly-hunter then," said Laleham, "I have learnt wisdom since."

"Go on," prompted Mariana.

"Well, it led me on in this way for quite two hours, till we came to the end of the wild country, and suddenly dropped down into a small village. You will laugh at what follows, though it had its sad side for me. We had come on the village at the end where there stands the parish church. . . . ."

"I know the village," said Mariana, absently, as if she were saying nothing. Laleham shot a troubled look at her, but continued.

"The churchyard was filled with a throng of people gaily dressed as for a wedding. What should my butterfly do but dash amongst them, and I after it, for it was too precious to lose. Soaring over the heads of the crowd, it dashed for shelter into the church, and I again after it, forgetting all but my butterfly — and there were two young people kneeling at the altar. My

abrupt entrance naturally made a sensation which brought me to myself, and, dropping on my knees in a pew, I watched my butterfly flicker up the aisle till it settled itself on the clasped hands of the kneeling bride. In surprise, she turned her head, and. . . . ."

"Well?"

"I saw her face."

"And the butterfly?"

"Escaped by the belfry."

"Quite a fairy tale," said Mariana, after a pause. "Now tell me about the second time you saw your butterfly."

"I hardly care to speak of it, Mariana — unless you care very much to hear."

"Would you rather not speak of it?"

"I would speak of it to no one but you."

"Do you wish to speak?"

"I do. Do you wish me to speak?"

"Yes, speak of it — to me," said Mariana gently.

"It is a very short story, Mariana — almost the same, excepting the end; for, three years afterwards, once more my butterfly

rose out of the reeds in almost exactly the same spot, and once more it coquetted with me for miles, and once more it dashed into that little churchyard . . . . but this time it did not vanish into the church, but went from grave to grave, as you say the soul perhaps wanders from star to star, and presently it stopped at one of the graves. I thought that now it was surely mine, and raised my net to strike, but, as I did so, I read a name upon a stone. . . . ."

In the darkness Mariana reached out her hand and took Laleham's, and, after a silence, she said:

"I know the grave," and, after another silence, she said:

"I have heard that she was very beautiful."

Then the two sat on, saying no more in the starlight, and all the while, though neither knew of it till they returned to the library lamps, a little blue butterfly had been hiding in Mariana's hair.

My Castle in Spain

MY CASTLE IN SPAIN

PERHAPS the dream which a man gives up hardest is that of his ideal home, the dream-house builded just as he and Love would build it to dwell in together — had he and Love the money! — the dream-house which in every sensitive particular would be the appropriate habitation of his spirit; in short his castle-in Spain. Castles in Spain are not necessarily expensive. A cottage in Spain is just as good as a castle if you think so; and if you know the secret you can make a castle in Spain out of one-room-and-bath in a New York apartment house. I myself have never done it. I have never been happy enough for that.

No, I am afraid I should need money for my castle-in Spain. It would cost a fortune to build and many fortunes to run. For it would be a real castle, and real castles have always been expensive, even in feudal days

when labour was somewhat cheaper than it is now. I want no cloud-castle built of moon-beams and rainbows for me and Love to dwell in, but a real earth-castle like that of an old French troubadour, with walls 34 feet thick — to keep Love safe from other troubadours — a donjon 190 feet high and 100 feet in diameter, and other massive visible particulars. I see no reason why it should not be literally situated in Spain somewhere at the eastern end of the Pyrenees, but I confess a softness for Provence, perhaps on account of the name. A situation almost equally Spanish might be found for it there on a toppling crag, somewhere up among those strange rock villages of the Maritime Alps, filled with Moorish ghosts, in the nearness all chasms and parched shadows and the thirsty sun, in the distance forests of cork-oak, silhouettes of eucalyptus and cypress. Then olives and olives and the Mediterranean Sea.

I choose Provence because the situation of one's castle-in-Spain is almost more

important than the castle itself. Environment and association count for so much in the matter of one's dream-house. You may build the most wonderful castle-in-Spain, but it will go for nothing, seem indeed almost ridiculous, a parody, if you build it in some absurdly wrong place. No offence to Omaha, no offence to Liverpool, no offence to Glasgow — but the most beautiful castle-in-Spain would be wasted in any one of those animated capitals of industry. As the setting of a jewel is hardly less important than the jewel itself, so is the situation of one's castle-in-Spain. Stonehenge or Westminster Abbey would be as much at home transported, numbered stone by stone, to Herald Square or Michigan Avenue — and American capital has dreamed some such dream — as one's castle-in-Spain built in any one of those, or such, cities as I have mentioned.

As Keats has written:

" . . . . the trees
That whisper round a temple become soon
Dear as the temple's self."

One indeed might add that without the trees there is no temple. I use trees here as symbolic of environment, but, literally speaking, it is impossible to exaggerate the importance of trees to one's castle-in-Spain. Ancient trees have always brought distinction to their possessors. It is the old park and the avenues — the setting — that give many an English house its imposing significance. To cut down the trees would be like shaving the head of a beautiful woman.

So my castle-in-Spain must be almost lost amid miles of mysterious trees, surrounded on every side by haunted forests, the home of wood-demons and the wild boar and the hunting horn and the bearded robber and the maiden in distress; and, like lanes of silver trumpets, six avenues of lime-trees shall sweep up to its six drawbridges in the air.

Of course my castle would be fortified against a world which would naturally wish to rob me of my happiness. It would be armed to the teeth with quick-firing guns of the latest pattern, and these would be

manned by Japanese gunners of the quaintest size and shape. I may say — in parenthesis — that my valets would not be Japanese, but English. Each nation has its own special gift to give us, and England still remains famous for its valets. I should need volumes in folio adequately to describe my castle-in-Spain, and at least three of them would be needed to tell about my garden. Ah, what a garden there would be in my castle-in-Spain! Perhaps, aside from other fancies which I should expect to indulge, there would only be three on which I would really set my heart:

(1) A garden.
(2) A library.
(3) A private chapel.

I should not hope, nor even could I wish, to be original in my garden; for man's early desire of gardens had developed into a learned convoluted art even before Solomon wrote:

"A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. My plants are an orchard of pomegranate, with pleasant fruits;

camphire, with spikenard, spikenard with saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices: A fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon. Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out."

My garden would, first of all, be made of dew; next of grass, and then of very old trees. Oak-trees, poplars and beeches, would dominate my garden; and, as for the other trees, they would all be trees of veritably *living* green — chestnuts and sycamores and willows. There would be no so-called *ever*-greens in my garden, trees that are ever-green because they are never-green — except one: the only ever-green tree in my garden would be the laurel. Nothing but freshness and sap and leafage of transparent emerald would be trees in my garden; and the flowers of my garden would be all spring and summer: snowdrop, crocus and daffodil; violet, rose and honeysuckle. There would be no autumn in my garden. September with its paper flowers, chrysanthemum and dahlia,

and all its knife-scented funereal blooms, must not walk in my garden; nor shall the white feet of winter tread down my shining lawns.

Here are but, so to say, the first principles of my garden. As I said, it would take volumes in folio adequately to tell about my garden. But this much further I may say: that among the many divisions and sub-divisions of my garden, there would be three. First there would be my star-garden. In this would be planted flowers that bloom only under the influence of the stars; flowers that open at the setting of the moon, and close with the rising of the morning star. For these flowers I should build a high hanging garden, dizzily thrust up into the morning sky, on the summit of some cloud-encircled turret of my castle. The flowers in this garden would be whiter than snow and purer than my first love.

Then there would be my sun-garden. In this would be planted the warm-breathed, earth-coloured flowers, the yellow and scarlet flowers, the purple and saffron, the orange and crimson, all the hot and savage flowers of the sun.

And, again, there would be my moon-garden, a subterranean realm of pale leaves and ghostly flowers, a dim garden of excavated terraces descending beneath the dungeoned foundations of my castle, irrigated from its green-mantled moat, and fed through slanting shafts of hollowed stone — with the surreptitious light of the moon.

I should allow but few birds in my garden. The eagle should nest, if it would, on some crag-like corner of my battlements, and the hawk would be welcome to soar and swoop about my towers. But I would have no nightingales in my gardens, those birds of make-believe melodious song, those posturing troubadours of the air. Only the simple sincere-throated birds should sing in my garden: the thrush and the black-bird and the robin; the starling with his simple-minded whistle, the curlew with his lost broken-hearted call; and, at twilight, the nightjar should make his rugged music amid the fern. And the swallow and the sparrow should be made welcome in every corner of

my dominions. Generally, I should encourage the quiet birds, the working, building, fighting birds, the birds that sing no more than is necessary, or natural.

Everywhere in my garden shall be heard the sound of running water, brooks making their way unseen under secret boughs, and fountains whispering to themselves on solitary lawns. There shall be such a rustle of fresh boughs in my garden, and such a ripple of streams, that you shall hardly be able to tell whether the leaves or the brooks are talking. Also there shall be pools hidden away in sanctuaries of the garden, pools sacred with water-lilies, and visited only of the dragon-fly and the lonely bee.

And there shall be other ponds in my garden, green mossy ponds as old as the foundations of my castle, fish-ponds, the ancestral home of monastic carp, strange ancient fish with wise ugly faces, and gold collars round their necks, telling how some old king caught them and threw them back again into the pond two hundred years ago.

My library would, first of all, be vast and multitudinous, a mysterious collection of books without beginning and without end, a romantic infinitude of learning and fragrance of old leather. It should go uncatalogued as the wilderness. No human index in the form of a librarian should tame it into prim classification. It should grow wild as the virgin forest, and unlooked-for adventures of the soul should lie in ambush in every alcove and lonely backwater of its haunted shelves. No less than a thousand rooms, big and little, winding in and out, wandering here and there, would be needed to contain it. There are many book-lovers who will hardly understand this Gargantuan passion for a huge library. A small and sensitively chosen collection of books is their ideal. For me, however, a few books are no more a library than a few trees are a forest, or a few gallons of water an ocean. A library is the firmament of the soul, and each particular star gains in significance from being a shining unit in all that celestial mystery.

While I should aim to have a library coextensive with the mental history of humanity, from the clay books of Babylon to the latest French novel, the learned rooms I should oftenest loiter in would be those rainbowed with the gold and purple of monkish manuscripts, the rooms mysterious with grimoires and herbals and ancient treatises on the occult sciences, the rooms of black-letter and the types of Aldus and those other first printers through whose magic Virgil and Catullus and Horace rose again from the grave. And I would have my library built with innumerable secret chambers and sliding panels and hidden passages — so that, whenever it was my desire, I could shut myself up with a favourite author for a week at a time, and domestic search for me be quite in vain.

My chapel will need few words. It would be merely a crucifix, silence, and sunlight.

I said that there would be no librarian in my library, similarly there would be no gardener in my garden, no priest in my

chapel. The places of the soul need no custodians. The worshippers are the priests.

Of course, I should expect to indulge many an idle fancy and picturesque whim in my castle-in-Spain but they would take too long to tell of. Here I have but set down what I conceive to be the reasonable necessities of a dream. I have said nothing, for example, of my treasure-caves beneath the castle, vaults lit by enormous carbuncles, and filled with countless coffers of bronze, overflowing with ancient coins and precious stones. Nor have I spoken of my paradise of butterflies, a great enclosed garden where I would rear all the flower-winged things that, like illuminated letters or the painted souls of Japanese girls, flit and flicker through the sunlit world. Nor have I told of my palace of serpents, where python and cobra and all the ringed, gliding, spangled creatures that hiss and sting should coil about tropical trees, and sleep their mysterious sleep, or fall down like lightning on their paralysed prey. Then, too, I might tell of my great aquarium where,

at ease in my luxurious diving-bell, I would lie all day watching iridescent fishes all flounced and frilled with rainbows, and slow-moving elemental shapes that brood eternally at the bottom of the sea.

A hundred other such fancies I shall hope to indulge in my castle-in-Spain, and one more I must not forget, for no castle would be complete without it — the oubliette. Into that I would fling all my sorrows and cares, and all — unwelcome visitors.

Once-Upon-a-Time

ONCE-UPON-A-TIME

WHEN I was a child there grew at the back of my father's house a deep wood. It may not have been so vast in extent as it seemed to me; but to my childish imagination it seemed boundless, endless, dark and dense, and infinitely mysterious. It frightened me, yet the fear was full of fascination. Delicious was the thrill with which sometimes in my lonely rambles I would venture a few steps further within its haunted recesses than I was wont to have courage for. As a rule, I restricted my explorations to its sunlit margins, and, so soon as I found myself among the shadows, would fly back with a beating heart into the sun.

Never, said I to my childish heart, had the foot of man penetrated into these solitudes, on which lay so deep a spell of beautiful terror; and, so far back as I can remember,

this wood was the wonderland which I peopled with all the fancies of a child's imagination. All the heroes and heroines of my nursery-books lived somewhere in my wood. It was the scene of all their adventures, and, like a stage, was capable of supplying an ever-varying *mise-en-scéne*. Sometimes when the moon was up I thought of it as peopled by fairies, and was certain that, if only the hardihood were mine to dare its fantastic shadows, I should surely come upon a fairy revel in full swing. When in the daytime I came upon rings of toadstools with their quaint kobold hats, I knew that they were trolls who took that form during the day, and that if only I were to hide behind a tree and wait for night, I would see them suddenly, at the first touch of the wand of the moon, waken up as if nothing had happened, and once more set their merry wheels a-spinning. But then there was the old witch with the red hood to fear, and the ogre with the six heads, not to speak of the wolves and bears and various other wild beasts

that roamed the woods after dark. Not only wolves — but were-wolves too!

As I grew older, I grew braver, and, persuading myself that I was one of those who bore a charmed life, I found courage to push my explorations further and further into the interior. Thus I became the discoverer of glades and dingles exquisitely lonely with sunshine and haunted flowers, brooding solitudes of silent fern, hidden springs brimming up through the hushed moss, and little rivers dripping from rock to rock in the stillness, like the sound of falling pearls.

But the spell over the wood was above all the spell of beauty, the spell of a breathless enchantment, a spell so deep that the wild-rose growing there seemed other than the wild-rose that grew outside, seemed indeed enchanted, and the very blackberries growing on the great cages of bramble, humming with bees and flickering with butterflies, seemed a magic fruit — which I ate with a beautiful fear that I should be changed into a milk-white fawn, or suddenly find myself

a little silver fish in the stream yonder, with the Princess's lost wedding ring in my inside.

The Princess! Why was it that almost from the first I associated the wood with a beautiful princess? I seemed always to be expecting her at some turning of the green pathways, riding upon a white palfrey. Of course, she would be riding upon a white palfrey. Or, perhaps I should come upon her suddenly in one of the sunny openings of the wood, combing her black hair with a golden comb. Or, perhaps she was dead, and this wild-rose was growing up out of her pure wild heart. I made up many stories about her, but this was the story that took strongest hold of my fancy — that she had lost her way in the wood, and at last, worn out with weariness and hunger, had lain her down and died — just here where this rose-bush had drawn its fragrance from her last sweet breath, and its bloom from her fading cheek. I used to sit for hours by the rose-bush, and picture her lying beneath with her eyes closed

and a gold crown upon her head, and at morning when the roses were filled with dew, I would say to myself: "O the beautiful Princess! She has been weeping in the night." And then I would drink her tears out of the little pearl cups of the rose; but I was careful never to mar the tender petals, lest the Princess should feel the pain of it down in the aromatic mould.

One day, however, my fancy took another turn, and I said to myself that perchance if I were to pluck one of her roses, the Princess would wake from her enchanted sleep, and stand before me with her strange death-sleepy eyes, and ask me the way back to her lost castle. So one morning when the roses were more than usually drenched with the tears of the Princess, I took heart and plucked the most beautiful rose, saying as I plucked it: "Arise, little Princess and I will take you back to your castle." Then I waited, and presently I seemed to hear a sigh of happiness, like a spring zephyr, just behind me. I turned, and there stood a maiden

with black hair, and eyes the colour of which I could not rightly discern, because they seemed filled with moonlight.

"Are you the Princess?" I asked.

"Yes!" she answered, "I am the Princess, and my name is Once-Upon-a-Time."

"Beautiful Princess," I said, "may I take you back to your castle?"

"Are you sure you know the way, little man?" she said, "for I have been asleep so long that I have quite forgotten it."

"O yes!" I answered eagerly, though really I was far from sure — but I knew that I had friends in the wood on whom I could rely, if by chance I took the wrong turning. So, "O yes!" I answered, "I have in my wanderings passed by your castle many a time. It stands high among the rocks in the middle of the wood, so high among the summer clouds that it makes one dizzy to look up at it, with its donjons and keeps and draw-bridges and battlements, glittering with men-at-arms, and here and there, blowing loose among the stone towers, the bright hair

of some beautiful waiting-woman, watching the dark avenues of the woods for the returning huntsmen, and one loved face among the merry horns. All around the castle grow the oldest trees of the wood, very close and dark, and seeming to touch the sky; and thereabout are grim rocks, and hollow caves haunted by dragons and many another evil thing. In one of these a giant lives, so terrible that the bravest knights have gone up against him — only to leave their bones to whiten at the mouth of his cave. And by the castle walls runs an enchanted river, in which live beautiful water-witches, that sing in the moonlight, and draw the lonely home-returning knight down into their watery bowers. In the castle itself is one tower loftier than all the rest, with windows on every side, through which you can see, as in a magic glass, the whole wide earth, with its cities and its roads and all its hidden places. And there, all day long, sits an aged wizard listening to the world, and weaving his spells ——"

"Yes!" said the Princess, perhaps a little impatient at my long description. "That is my castle. But are you quite sure that you know the way?"

At that moment there came and perched upon a bough close by one of those friends, on whom, as I said, I was relying to help me out if I should lose my way. It was a Blue-Bird, with which I had become well-acquainted in my rambles in the wood.

"Wait a moment, Princess," I said. "To make quite sure, I will consult this friend of mine here."

Now I must explain that the Blue-Bird, being himself a singer, it is necessary to address him in song. Plain prose he is quite unable to understand. So, if I had said: "Blue-Bird, please tell me the way to the Castle of Princess Once-Upon-a-Time," he would have shaken his head like a deaf man. Therefore, I spoke to him in this fashion instead; or, rather, I should say that this is the grown-up meaning of what I sang — for the actual song I have forgotten:

O Blue-Bird, sing the hidden way
To Once-Upon-a-Time;
We know you cannot speak in prose,
So answer us in rhyme.

Blue-Bird of Dreams, alone you know
The way the dream-folk take,
O tell us the right way to go,
Before, Blue-Bird, we wake.

Dreamers, we seek the way of dreams —
O you that know so well
Each twist and turning of the way,
Blue-Bird, will you not tell?

Blue-Bird, if aught that we possess
Has any worth to you,
O take it, Blue-Bird, here it is,
But tell us what to do.

The way of dreams, the wonder-way,
Wonder and winding streams,
Blue-Bird, two dreamers ask of you
To point the way of dreams.

The way is dangerous, we know,
And much beset with dread;
But then, it is the only way,
Blue-Bird, we care to tread.

For this we know: no fact or fear
Of the dream-world we seek
Can be so terrible to us
As those that, week by week,

Day in, day out, bleach and benumb
The sacred self sincere,
The death domestic who hath faced
Hath faced the whole of fear.

We are so fearful we may lose
The thrill and scent of things,
Forget the way to smell a flower,
Hear a bird when it sings.

O Blue-Bird, sing us on our way
Beyond the world that seems —
Two dreamers who have lost their way —
Back to the world of dreams.

To this the Blue-Bird made answer in a song, which, as before, I translate into grown-up language:

The way of dreams — the Blue-Bird sang —
Is never hard to find,
So soon as you have really left
The grown-up world behind.

So soon as you have come to see
That what the others call
Realities, for such as you,
Are never real at all;

So soon as you have ceased to care
What others say or do,
And understand that they are they,
And you — thank God! — are you.

Then is your foot upon the path,
Your journey well begun,
And safe the road for you to tread,
Moonlight, or morning sun.

Pence of this world you shall not take,
Yea! no provision heed;
A wild-rose gathered in the wood
Will buy you all you need.

Hungry, the birds shall bring you food,
The bees their honey bring;
And, thirsty, you the crystal drink
Of an immortal spring.

For sleep, behold how deep and soft
With moss the earth is spread,
And all the trees of all the world
Shall curtain round your bed.

Enchanted journey! that begins
Nowhere and nowhere ends,
Seeking an ever-changing goal,
Nowhither winds and wends.

For destination yonder flower,
For business yonder bird,
Aught better worth the travelling to
I never saw or heard.

O long dream-travel of the soul!
First the green earth to tread —
And still yon other starry track
To travel when you 're dead.

With directions so explicit, it was next to impossible to miss the way. So, with little hesitation, Princess Once-Upon-a-Time and I stepped out through the old wood on the way to her castle. As we went along, she told me many things that I have never forgotten, for all of them have come true; but it is necessary for the reader to be reminded that I was still quite a boy, little more than a child, and was, therefore, too inexperienced to give the proper value to what she told me. This speech of hers particularly has remained with me. She said it as we were nearing the end of our walk together, and the turrets of her castle were coming in sight.

"This is not the last time we shall meet," she said, "indeed, we shall meet many times. In a sense we shall be always meeting, though you may not recognise me; for you are one of those who are born my subjects. You are one of those for whom there is no Present, no Future. Your life will always be lived as a dream of What-Might-Have-Been, or What-Once-Was. Your happiness

will always be — once-upon-a-time! You are of those who are foredoomed to love the shadow of joy, and the dream of love. Nothing real will ever happen to you — for the reason that your experience will be forever haunted by the more beautiful things that might have happened, or once-upon-a-time did happen to more fortunate men. No beauty will ever seem beautiful enough — for your eyes will be always upon Helen of Troy, or Cleopatra of Egypt. However bright your fortune, the will-o'-the-wisp of a brighter fortune will continually flicker before you. Your dream can never be fulfilled — because it is so entirely a dream. All your days you shall be possessed of old stories, and forgotten fancies, and you shall love only the face you shall never find."

And, as she ended, Princess Once-Upon-a-Time bade me farewell, for by this we had come to the gate of her castle.

I went back home through the wood, with her eyes in my heart, and her words talking to-and-fro in my brain. Twice I lost my

way, but the friends on whom I relied did not forsake me. Once it was a beautiful little snake that zig-zagged in front of me till we came to the right turning. And once it was a chipmunk that seemed to know everything. By the time I came to the home-end of the wood, the stars were rising, and the little creatures of the night were creaking and whirring about me. The windows of home were shining with lamps — welcome beacons, no doubt you will say — and yet, strange as it may sound, I was rather sorry to come upon them so easily. They seemed so safe and comfortable — bed at nine and oatmeal porridge in the morning. I knew that so soon as I lifted the latch all mystery was at an end. Even the punishment that would surely fall upon me for my truancy was quite unmysterious — almost as familiar as my porridge. Bed and porridge — and those voices in the wood! O anti-climax of a wonderful day. How truly had the Princess spoken. What was home to me — with its trimmed lamps, and its quiet carpets and

its regular hours; what was home compared with those night-voices and the rising moon.

Still, being hungry, I chose the kitchen door, and by a friendly domestic was smuggled away to bed — with a stomach full of pleasant dreams.

Such was my first meeting with Once-Upon-a-Time.

Next time I met her my boyhood was gone by, and my fancy was no longer occupied with the nursery-stories of which the Blue-Bird had sung. Giants and dragons were receding from my imagination, and my fancy, I must confess, was beginning to take a more sentimental turn. The wood still remained my wonderland, but the wonders I sought there were of a different, if scarcely less dangerous, character. By this I had exchanged my nursery-books for the Mort D'Arthur and Spenser and Shakespeare and such like romantic literature; and my head was, therefore, full of the beautiful ladies and noble lovers of old time. I fear

there is no denying that I had by this become quite bookish, and you could scarcely have encountered me in the wood or elsewhere, without some poet or some old play-book under my arm. Ah, how happy were those long summer mornings when I would lie upon a green bank, absorbed in some honeyed tale of lovers dead and gone, with the green boughs above sunnily silhouetted on the page. And, just as when a boy the wood had been the scene of all my old nursery-stories, so still it served me as the stage for all my romantic heroes and heroines. It was by turns every wood mentioned in my poets. Of course, it was, first and foremost the Forest of Arden; and one particular glade presided over by a giant oak was easily identified by me as the green court-room of the banished Duke. As for Jacques, I felt myself his very brother, and replenished the woodland streams with sentimental tears, with no less enjoyment of my own melancholy than he. Rosalind, of course, I was expecting to meet with every moment,

and did not fail to inscribe the tree-trunks with sundry rhymes which I hoped might catch her eye. Of these I may have a story to tell later. When the wood was in darker moods, when it wore its tragic mask of thunder and lightning, or put on some sinister witchery of twilight, I would say that Macbeth was on his way to meet the weird sisters. Sometimes, it was "a wood near Athens," or at others, remembering my Keats, it was that "forest on the shores of Crete," where Lycius met the snake-woman Lamia. The wood, indeed, was filled with memories of Keats, and if any one in the world knew where the lover of Isabella had been buried by her murderous brothers, surely it was I. I too had discovered the hollow oak where Merlin lay entranced; and many a night, hidden behind the bole of some gigantic beech, had watched Selene bend in a bright crescent above her sleeping shepherd lad.

But it is time I told you of my second meeting with Once-Upon-a-Time. I was

lying in a bower of wild-roses which I had purposely trained to resemble the bower in which Nicolete slept the night when she fled from the castle of Beaucaire, as we have all read in the delectable history of the loves of Aucassin and Nicolete. It was the golden end of afternoon, and the shadows were still made half of gold. I was lying face down over my book, when suddenly I seemed aware of a new presence near me — as one is conscious that a bird had alighted on a bough close by, or a flower newly opened. Being accustomed to such companions, I did not look up. I was too deep in the loves of my book folk, and too anxious to finish the long euphuistic chapter before the setting sun should warn me of dinner-time. But presently a low laugh sounded behind me, and the sweetest of voices said:

"Young sir, you are very selfish with that great book there" — I may say that it was a folio *Arcadia* of Sir Philip Sidney — "it is so big that I am sure that there is room for two pairs of eyes —"

"Come read with me," said I, looking up and blushing.

"Nay, I am no Francesca," she answered; "I would not interrupt your reading, young Paolo."

"But I am tired of reading," I said, closing the old book.

"The sun will soon be gone," she answered. "Had you not better finish your chapter?"

"I would rather finish it by moonlight," I answered, looking into her eyes.

"You are a saucy stripling," she said. "I should not be surprised if you wrote these lines I just found on yonder tree."

"What lines?" I asked; for the trees, to tell the truth, were tattooed with my verses.

"These," she answered.

"O these!" I said, laughing.

"Read them to me," she said.

"But they are so long," I hesitated, "no less than a chant-royal — a Prayer to the Queen of Love, in five long verses, and an *envoi!* Are you quite sure you can support so much verse at one sitting —"

"I have not lived at the Court of King Renée for nothing," she replied, laughing.

"The Court of King Renée!" I exclaimed, looking at her in amazement. "You have really lived there? How wonderful! Tell me about it."

"Indeed, I have!" she answered, with a mocking expression that seemed strangely at variance with her romantic privileges. "O yes! No doubt it is a wonderful place for you ballad-making gentlemen. There you can strum and hum all day to your heart's content, and your poor bored mistresses must listen to all your magniloquent nonsense, without a yawn — besides being quite sure that you don't mean a single word of it. Yes! No woman can live at the Court of King Renée unless she is prepared for poetry morning, noon and night — Yes! and far into the middle of the night — and even, when at last you have fallen asleep again, after being awakened by some long-winded serenade, you are barely off, when,

with the first break of dawn, comes another fool beneath your window with his lute and his falsetto singing you an 'aubade!' An aubade, indeed! And you at last so beautifully asleep. As you would have your lady love you, dear youth — never sing her an aubade!"

"I marvel that, with such a distaste for song-craft," I said, "that you should bid me read you a chant-royal, a form so much longer than the aubade ——"

"O that is different! It is not made use of to wake beautiful ladies from their sleep at unreasonable hours, but reminds one of dreamy old orchards in summer afternoons, and the drowsy bees and the flitting butterflies, and the sea a flickering riband of blue in the distance. It is like the murmur of a beautiful voice talking low to a beautiful lady in the still summer afternoon. The sound of the voice is soothing, and one pays no heed to the words. Besides," she ended, laughing, "I like the poet, and that makes a great difference ——"

At this I bent low and kissed her hand, and without further parley began to read:

O mighty Queen, our Lady of the fire,
The light, the music, and the honey, all
Blent in one power, one passionate desire
Man calleth Love — 'Sweet Love,' the blessed call —
I come a sad-eyed suppliant to thy knee,
If thou hast pity, pity grant to me;
If thou hast bounty, here a heart I bring
For all that bounty thirst and hungering;
O Lady, save thy grace, there is no way
For me, I know, but lonely sorrowing —
Send me a maiden meet for love, I pray!

I lay in darkness, face down in the mire,
And prayed that darkness might become my pall;
The rabble rout roared round me like some quire
Of filthy animals primordial;
My heart seemed like a toad eternally
Prisoned in stone, ugly and sad as he;
Sweet sunlight seemed a dream, a mythic thing,
And life some beldam's dotard gossiping:
Then Lady, I bethought me of thy sway,
And hoped again, rose up this prayer to wing—
Send me a maiden meet for love, I pray!

Lady, I bear no high resounding lyre
To hymn thy glory, and thy foes appal
With thunderous splendour of my rhythmic ire;
A little lute I lightly touch, and small
My skill thereon: yet, Lady, if it be
I ever woke ear-winning melody,
'Twas for thy praise I sought the throbbing string,
Thy praise alone — for all my worshipping
Is at thy shrine, thou knowest, day by day;
Then shall it be in vain my plaint to sing?
Send me a maiden meet for love, I pray!

Yea! Why of all men should this sorrow dire
Unto thy servant bitterly befall?
For, Lady, thou dost know I ne'er did tire
Of thy sweet sacraments and ritual;
In morning meadows I have knelt to thee,
In noontide woodlands hearkened hushedly
Thy heart's warm beat in sacred slumbering,
And in the spaces of the night heart ring
Thy voice in answer to the spheral lay:
Now 'neath thy throne my suppliant life I fling —
Send me a maiden meet for love, I pray!

I ask no maid for all men to admire,
Mere body's beauty hath in me no thrall,
And noble birth, and sumptuous attire,

Are gauds I crave not — yet shall have withal,
With a sweet difference, in my heart's own
She,
Whom words speak not, but eyes know when
they see,
Beauty beyond all glass's mirroring,
And dream and glory hers for garmenting;
Her birth — O Lady, wilt thou say me nay? —
Of thine own womb, of thine own nurturing —
Send me a maiden meet for love, I pray!

ENVOI

Sweet Queen who sittest at the heart of spring,
My life is thine, barren or blossoming;
'Tis thine to flush it gold or leave it grey:
And so unto thy garment's hem I cling—
Send me a maiden meet for love, I pray.

"I wonder," I said after a little while, when she had praised my verses, and I sat by her side holding her hands and looking into her strange far-away eyes, "I wonder if you are the answer to my prayer — for so soon as I looked upon you, I gave you all my love, and, if you cannot give me yours in return, my heart will break —"

She shook her head sadly, and her eyes

seemed to grow still more far-away, but she made no answer more, for all my entreaties, till at last the day had gone, and the moon was rising through the wood — and she still sitting by my side like a spirit in the spectral light. Once I seemed to hear her moan in the silence, and a shiver passed through her body. Then she turned her eyes upon me — they seemed like wells brimming with stars:

"I love you," she said, "but we can never be each other's. My name is Once-Upon-a Time."

At this I threw myself at her feet face down in the grass and wept bitterly, and I felt her hand soothingly laid upon my hair, and heard her voice softly bidding me be comforted. And for a long time it was so with us, till methinks I must have fallen asleep of the sweet soothing of her hand on my hair, and the murmur of her sweet voice — for, when I raised my head from the grass, the place was empty and the dawn was stealing with feet of pearl through the wood.

The dawn!

"She feared," I cried, bitterly, "she feared that I might sing her my aubade!"

But this, of course, was only the lip-cynicism of my sad young heart, stricken with the arrows of that haunted beauty.

Once-Upon-a-Time! Thus had the Princess met me again as she had said, and often as I grew up to be a man, and walked but seldom in that old wood of dreams, her words would come back to me: "You are of those who are foredoomed to love the shadow of joy, and the dream of love. Your happiness will always be — Once-Upon-a Time." For, as I walked the ways of the world, I saw that my old wood had only been a dream picture of the real world outside, and that the real world itself, in which my manhood was now called on to play its part, was no less a dream of beauty and terror, of love and death, of good and evil, than my old wood itself; and, like my old wood, it seemed haunted for me by the face of a Princess — some dear, desired face of woman lost amid these drifting faces, as in

my boyhood it had been lost among the leaves of the wood. Beautiful faces, beautiful faces, drifting by in the crowded streets — but never my face among all the faces. Hints of my face, even glimpses perhaps — sometimes almost the certainty that it is she yonder — but a sudden turn of the head, and alas! It is not she! Yet a day did come at last, when the mob of unmeaning faces seemed suddenly to open, as the clouds fall away right and left before the moon; or as in a wilderness of leaves without a blossom, one should come upon the breathless beauty of some lonely flower.

Yes! It was my face at last.

We looked at each other but for a moment in the street, which her beauty had suddenly made silent for me as the desert — but for a moment, yet Eternity must be like that look we gave each other.

Then, though she spoke no audible word, my heart heard her say:

"Look in my face; my name is Might-Have-Been; I am also called No-More, Too-Late, Farewell."

On one of her beautiful fingers my sad eyes had caught the glimmer of a small gold band — and, once more as we passed away from each other, my bitter heart mocked at its own bitterness, and remembering my boyish fairy-tales, I said to myself:

"The Princess has found her wedding ring!"

And that was my last meeting with Princess Once-Upon-a-Time.

The Little Joys of Margaret

THE LITTLE JOYS OF MARGARET

MARGARET had seen her five sisters one by one leave the family nest to set up little nests of their own. Her brother, the eldest child of a family of seven, had left the old home almost beyond memory and settled in London. Now and again he made a flying visit to the small provincial town of his birth, and sometimes he sent two little daughters to represent him — for he was already a widowed man and relied occasionally on the old roof-tree to replace the lost mother. Margaret had seen what sympathetic spectators called her "fate" slowly approaching for some time — particularly when, five years ago, she had broken off her engagement with a worthless boy. She had loved him deeply, and, had she loved him less, a refined girl in the provinces does not find it easy to

replace a discarded suitor — for the choice of young men is not excessive. Her sisters had been more fortunate, and so, as I have said, one by one they left their father's door in bridal veils. But Margaret stayed on, and at length, as had been foreseen, became the sole nurse of a beautiful old invalid mother, a kind of lay sister in the nunnery of home.

She came of a beautiful family. In all the big family of seven there was not one without some kind of good looks. Two of her sisters were acknowledged beauties, and there were those who considered Margaret the most beautiful of all. It was all the harder, such sympathisers said, that her youth should thus fade over an invalid's couch, the bloom of her complexion be rubbed out by arduous vigils, and the lines prematurely etched in her skin by the strain of a self-denial proper, no doubt, to homely girls and professional nurses, but peculiarly wanton and wasteful in the case of a girl so beautiful as Margaret.

There are, alas! a considerable number

of women predestined by their lack of personal attractiveness for the humbler tasks of life. Instinctively we associate them with household work, nursing, and the general drudgery of existence. One never dreams of their having a life of their own. They have no accomplishments, nor any of the feminine charms. Women to whom an offer of marriage would seem as terrifying as a comet, they belong to the neutrals of the human hive, and are, practically speaking, only a little higher than the paid domestic. Indeed, perhaps, their one distinction is that they receive no wages.

Now for so attractive a girl as Margaret to be merged in so dreary, undistinguished, a class was manifestly preposterous. It was a stupid misapplication of human material. A plainer face and a more homespun fibre would have served the purpose equally well.

Margaret was by no means so much a saint of self-sacrifice as not to have realised her situation, with natural human pangs.

Youth only comes once — especially to a woman; and

No hand can gather up the withered fallen petals of the Rose of youth.

Petal by petal, Margaret had watched the rose of her youth fading and falling. More than all her sisters, she was endowed with a zest for existence. Her superb physical constitution cried out for the joy of life. She was made to be a great lover, a great mother; and to her, more than most, the sunshine falling in muffled beams through the lattices of her mother's sick-room came with a maddening summons to — live. She was so supremely fitted to play a triumphant part in the world oustide there, so gay of heart, so victoriously vital.

At first, therefore, the renunciation, accepted on the surface with so kind a face, was a source of secret bitterness and hidden tears. But time, with its mercy of compensation, had worked for her one of its many mysterious transmutations, and shown her of what fine gold her apparently leaden

days were made. She was now thirty-three; though, for all her nursing vigils, she did not look more than twenty-nine, and was now more than resigned to the loss of the peculiar opportunities of youth — if, indeed, they could be said to be lost already. "An old maid," she would say, "who has cheerfully made up her mind to be an old maid, is one of the happiest, and, indeed, most enviable, people in all the world."

Resent the law as we may, it is none the less true that renunciation brings with it a mysterious initiation, a finer insight. Its discipline would seem to refine and temper our organs of spiritual perception, and thus make up for the commoner experience lost by a rarer experience gained. By dedicating herself to her sick mother, Margaret undoubtedly lost much of the average experience of her sex and age, but almost imperceptibly it had been borne in upon her that she made some important gains of a finer kind. She had been brought very close to the mystery of human life, closer

than those who have nothing to do beyond being thoughtlessly happy can ever come. The nurse and the priest are initiates of the same knowledge. Each alike is a sentinel on the mysterious frontier between this world and the next. The nearer we approach that frontier, the more we understand, not only of that world on the other side, but of the world on this. It is only when death throws its shadow over the page of life that we realise the full significance of what we are reading. Thus, by her mother's bedside, Margaret was learning to read the page of life under the illuminating shadow of death.

But, apart from any such mystical compensation, Margaret's great reward was that she knew her beautiful old mother better than any one else in the world knew her. As a rule, and particularly in a large family, parents remain half mythical to their children, awe-inspiring presences in the home, colossal figures of antiquity, about whose knees the younger generation crawls and gropes, but whose heads are hidden in the mists of

pre-historic legend. They are like personages in the Bible. They impress our imagination, but we cannot think of them as being quite real. Their histories smack of legend. And this, of course, is natural; for they had been in the world, had loved and suffered, so long before us that they seem a part of that ante-natal mystery out of which we sprang. When they speak of their old love-stories, it is as though we were reading Homer. It sounds so long ago. We are surprised at the vividness with which they recall happenings and personalities past and gone before, as they tell us, we were born. Before we were born! Yes! They belong to that mysterious epoch of time — "before we were born"; and unless we have a taste for history, or are drawn close to them by some sympathetic human exigency, as Margaret had been drawn to her mother, we are too apt, in the stress of making our own, to regard the history of our parents as dry-as-dust.

As the old mother sits there so quiet in her corner, her body worn to a silver thread,

and hardly anything left of her but her indomitable eyes; it is hard, at least for a young thing of nineteen, all aflush and aflurry with her new party gown, to realise that that old mother is infinitely more romantic than herself. She has sat there so long, perhaps, as to have come to seem part of the inanimate furniture of home, rather than a living being. Well! the young thing goes to her party, and dances with some callow youth who pays her clumsy compliments, and Margaret remains at home with the old mother in her corner. It is hard on Margaret! Yes; and yet, as I have said, it is thus she comes to know her old mother better than any one else knows her — society perhaps not so poor an exchange for that of smart, immature young men of one's own age.

As the door closes behind the important rustle of youthful laces, and Margaret and her mother are left alone, the mother's old eyes light up with an almost mischievous smile. If age seems humorous to youth, youth is even more humorous to age.

"It is evidently a great occasion, Peg," the old voice says, with the suspicion of a gentle mockery. "Don't you wish you were going?"

"You naughty old mother!" answers Margaret, going over and kissing her.

The two understand each other.

"Well, shall we go on with our book?" says the mother, after a while.

"Yes, dear, in a moment. I have first to get you your diet, and then we can begin."

"Bother the diet!" says the courageous old lady; "for two pins I 'd go to the ball myself. That old taffeta silk of mine is old enough to be in fashion again. What do you say, Peg, if you and I go to the ball together?"

"O it's too much trouble dressing, mother. What do you think?"

"Well, I suppose it is," answers the mother. "Besides, I want to hear what happens next to those two beautiful young people in our book. So be quick with my old diet, and come and read."

There is perhaps nothing so lovely, or so well worth having, as the gratitude of the old towards the young that care to give them more than the perfunctory ministrations to which they have long since grown sadly accustomed. There was no reward in the world that Margaret would have exchanged for the sweet looks of her old mother, who, being no merely selfish invalid, knew the value and the cost of the devotion her daughter was giving her.

"I can give you so little, my child, for all you are giving me," her mother would sometimes say; and the tears would spring to Margaret's eyes.

Yes! Margaret had her reward in this alone — that she had cared to decipher the lined old document of her mother's face. Her other sisters had passed it by more or less impatiently. It was like some ancient manuscript in a museum, which only a loving and patient scholar takes the trouble to read. But the moment you begin to pick out the words, how its crabbed text blossoms with

beautiful meanings and fascinating messages! It is as though you threw a dried rose into some magic water, and saw it unfold and take on bloom and fill with perfume, and bring back the nightingale that sang to it so many years ago. So Margaret loved her mother's old face, and learned to know the meaning of every line on it. Privileged to see that old face in all its private moments of feeling, under the transient revivification of deathless memories, she was able, so to say, to reconstruct its perished beauty and realise the romance of which it was once the alluring candle. For her mother had been a very great beauty, and if, like Margaret, you are able to see it, there is no history so fascinating as the bygone love-affairs of old people. How much more fascinating to read one's mother's love-letters than one's own!

Even in the history of the heart recent events have a certain crudity, and love itself seems the more romantic for having lain in lavender for fifty years. A certain style, a certain distinction, beyond question

go with antiquity, and to spend your days with a refined old mother is no less an education in style and distinction than to spend them in the air of old cities, under the shadow of august architecture, and in the sunset of classic paintings.

The longer Margaret lived with her old mother, the less she valued the so-called "opportunities" she had missed. Coming out of her mother's world of memories, there seemed something small, even common, about the younger generation to which she belonged — something lacking in significance and dignity.

For example, it had been her dream, as it is the dream of every true woman, to be a mother herself: and yet, somehow — though she would not admit it in so many words — when her young married sisters came with their babies, there was something about their bustling and complacent domesticity that seemed to make maternity bourgeois. She had not dreamed of being a mother like that. She was convinced that her old mother had

never been a mother like that. "They seem more like wet-nurses than mothers," she said to herself, with her wicked wit.

Was there, she asked herself, something in realisation that inevitably lost you the dream? Was to incarnate an ideal to materialise it? Did the finer spirit of love necessarily evaporate like some volatile essence with marriage? Was it better to remain an idealistic spectator such as she — than to run the risks of realisation?

She was far too beautiful, and had declined too many offers of commonplace marriage, for such questioning to seem the philosophy of disappointment. Indeed, the more she realised her own situation, the more she came to regard what others considered her sacrifice to her mother as a safeguard against the risk of a mediocre domesticity. Indeed, she began to feel a certain pride, as of a priestess, in the conservation of the dignity of her nature. It is better to be a vestal virgin than — some mothers.

And, after all, the maternal instinct of her nature found an ideal outlet in her brother's children — the two little motherless girls, who came every year to spend their holidays with their grandmother and their aunt Margaret.

Margaret had seen but little of their mother, but her occasional glimpses of her had left her with a haloed image of a delicate, spiritual face that grew more and more Madonna-like with memory. The nimbus of the Divine Mother, as she herself had dreamed of her, had seemed indeed to illumine that grave young face.

It pleased her imagination to take the place of that phantom mother, herself — a phantom mother. And who knows but that such dream-children, as she called those two little girls, were more satisfactory in the end than real children? They represented, so to say, the poetry of children. Had Margaret been a real mother, there would have been the prose of children as well. But here, as in so much else,

Margaret's seclusion from the responsible activities of the outside world enabled her to gather the fine flower of existence without losing the sense of it in the cares of its cultivation. I think that she comprehended the wonder and joy of children more than if she had been a real mother.

Seclusion and renunciation are great sharpeners and refiners of the sense of joy, chiefly because they encourage the habit of attentiveness.

"Our excitements are very tiny," once said the old mother to Margaret, "therefore we make the most of them."

"I don't agree with you, mother," Margaret had answered. "I think it is theirs that are tiny — trivial indeed, and ours that are great. People in the world lose the values of life by having too much choice; too much choice — of things not worth having. This makes them miss the real things — just as any one living in a city cannot see the stars for the electric lights. But we, sitting quiet in our corner, have

time to watch and listen when the others must hurry by. We have time, for instance, to watch that sunset yonder, whereas some of our worldly friends would be busy dressing to go out to a bad play. We can sit here and listen to that bird singing his vespers as long as he will sing — and personally I would n't exchange him for a prima donna. Far from being poor in excitements, I think we have quite as many as are good for us, and those we have are very beautiful and real."

"You are a brave child," answered her mother. "Come and kiss me," and she took the beautiful gold head into her hands and kissed her daughter with her sweet old mouth, so lost among wrinkles that it was sometimes hard to find it.

"But am I not right, mother?" said Margaret.

"Yes! you are right, dear, but you seem too young to know such wisdom."

"I have to thank you for it, darling," answered Margaret, bending down and kissing her mother's beautiful grey hair.

"Ah! little one," replied the mother, "it is well to be wise, but it is good to be foolish when we are young — and I fear I have robbed you of your foolishness."

"I shall believe you have if you talk like that," retorted Margaret, laughingly taking her mother into her arms and gently shaking her, as she sometimes did when the old lady was supposed to have been "naughty."

So for Margaret and her mother the days pass, and at first, as we have said, it may seem a dull life, and even a hard one, for Margaret. But she herself has long ceased to think so, and she dreads the inevitable moment when the divine friendship between her and her old mother must come to an end. She knows, of course, that it must come, and that the day cannot be far off when the weary old limbs will refuse to make the tiny journeys from bedroom to rocking-chair which have long been all that has been demanded of them; when the brave, humorous old eyes will be so weary that they cannot keep open

any more in this world. The thought is one that is insupportably lonely, and sometimes she looks at the invalid-chair, at the cup and saucer in which she serves her mother's simple food, at the medicine-bottle and the measuring-glass, at the knitted shawl which protects the frail old form against draughts, and at all such sad furniture of an invalid's life, and pictures the day when the homely, affectionate use of all these things will be gone forever; for so poignant is humanity that it sanctifies with endearing associations even objects in themselves so painful and prosaic. And it seems to Margaret that when that day comes, it would be most natural for her to go on the same journey with her mother — and still be her loving nurse in Paradise!

For who shall fill for her her mother's place on earth — and what occupation will be left for Margaret when her "beautiful old *raison d'être*," as she sometimes calls her mother, has entered into the sleep of the

blessed? She seldom thinks of that, for the thought is too lonely, and, meanwhile, she uses all her love and care to make this earth so attractive and cosey that the beautiful mother-spirit, who has been so long prepared for her short journey to heaven, may be tempted to linger here yet a little while longer. These ministrations, which began as a kind of renunciation, have now turned into an unselfish selfishness. Margaret began by feeling herself necessary to her mother; now her mother becomes more and more necessary to Margaret. Sometimes when she leaves her alone for a few moments in her chair, she laughingly bends over and says, "Promise me that you won't run away to heaven while my back is turned."

And the old mother smiles one of those transfigured smiles which seem only to light up the faces of those that are already half over the border of the spiritual world.

Winter is, of course, Margaret's time of chief anxiety, and then her efforts are redoubled to detain her beloved spirit in an

inclement world. Each winter passed in safety seems a personal victory over death. How anxiously she watches for the first sign of the returning spring, how eagerly she brings the news of early blade and bud, and, with the first violet, she feels that the danger is over for another year. When the spring is so afire that she is able to fill her mother's lap with a fragrant heap of crocus and daffodil, she dares at last to laugh and say:

"Now confess, mother, that you won't find sweeter flowers even in heaven."

And when the thrush is on the apple bough outside the window, Margaret will sometimes employ the same gentle raillery.

"Do you think, mother," she will say, "that an angel could sing sweeter than that thrush?"

"You seem very sure, Margaret, that I am going to heaven," the old mother will sometimes say, with one of her arch old smiles; "but do you know that I stole two peppermints yesterday?"

"You did!" says Margaret.

"I did indeed!" answers the mother, "and they have been on my conscience ever since."

"Really, mother! I don't know what to say," answers Margaret. "I had no idea that you are so wicked."

Many such little games the two play together, as the days go by; and often at bedtime, as Margaret tucks her mother into bed, she asks her:

"Are you comfortable, dear? Do you really think you would be much more comfortable in heaven?"

Or sometimes she will draw aside the window-curtains and say:

"Look at the stars, mother. . . . . Don't you think we get the best view of them down here?"

So it is that Margaret persuades her mother to delay her journey a little while.

What's In a Name

WHAT'S IN A NAME

WHEN Juliet made her immortal remark concerning the unimportance of names, she was very evidently labouring under great excitement; and it is pertinent to remark too that, being a woman, she came of a sex accustomed from time immemorial to change its name. Besides, in spite of her exclamation: "O Romeo, Romeo — wherefore art thou Romeo?" it is clear from the context that she was really thinking of her lover's surname, rather than his Christian name:

> "Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
> Or, if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
> And I'll no longer be a Capulet."

In fact, like any woman in love, she had already forgotten her own surname, and desired, above all things in the world, to write her name, and work it in stitchery as: *Juliet Montague.* There is little doubt that

in the seclusion of her chamber, she had already dipped her seldom-used quill into her ink-horn, and written it over thus many times:

Juliet Montague
Juliet Montague
Juliet Montague
. . . . . .
. . . . . .
. . . . . .

And, if I be wrong in this, of this I am quite sure — that for Romeo, at all events, there was only one name by which to call a woman, the name of Juliet. Indeed, I would venture almost to say that true love knows its affinity by no other sign so surely as the first sound of the destined name. You remember how in Paradise, Rossetti heard the lovers

> "Saying each to each
> Their heart-remembered names."

"Their souls were in their names!" says George Meredith, when Richard cried out the name of "Lucy," and Lucy the name of

"Richard." Their souls — and their inexorable futures!

So was it with Dante when he first saw her who was called " 'Beatrice' by those who knew not wherefore." And so, I believe, it is with every man and woman. In fact, I should hardly count it a fancy if it were told me that in our cradles some spirit whispers into the still sensitive porcelain of our ears the name to which our lives shall answer as to the master-word of some dead magician.

We do not know the name — till we hear it, and, meanwhile, may have many mistaken fancies about it. Some beautiful girl of our acquaintance may be so full of charm for us as to cause us so to fall in love with her that we imagine hers to be the destined name. But, after a while that prescience in our ears saves us from the illusion. The ear does not give back that fairy chime when we hear her name, which it can give only to the sound of the name of names. Often our ears seem on the point of vibrating, as a woman tells us her name for the first name, but, after

all — it was a false alarm of beauty, and we still go on seeking for the sound that alone can ring true. It may be that, in despair of ever hearing it, we content ourselves with another name; but that is a dangerous course, for one never knows when the fairy name may be spoken in our ears, calling us irresistibly to follow.

Thus I have known of men who were quite sure that their fate-name was Ann, tired out with waiting to hear it, marry another of the name of Mary — and then on their honeymoon, at last hear the name of Ann calling in their ears, with cruel unpunctuality. If only Ann had appeared and spoken her mystic name a month before — how different all would have been! And one could give others examples of other names heard too late.

One of the strangest stories of the kind is that of a friend of mine, which I propose to tell. From a mere boy the name of Irene had for him a prophetic beauty. Whenever he saw a beautiful face he felt certain that the only name worthy of it must be — Irene.

He said to himself that he would marry no woman whose name was not Irene, and, that if a little girl-child should come to them she must be called Irene. It will not in any way spoil my story to say that he is long since happily married to a wife whose name is — not Irene, and that his offspring consisting only of three boys, he has had no opportunity to make use of his name beautiful. But this is merely a parenthesis. Long before life brought him to these conclusions, de dreamed of, and even deliberately sought, his Irene. Strange as it may sound nowadays, among all his researches he never came upon a girl whose name was Irene; nor did any gentle accident ever bring a single Irene into his orbit. Every other woman's name in the appendix to the dictionary he seemed, at one time or another, to encounter — but Irene never!

You can hardly wonder that this negation of Irenes in his experience tended to deepen his original superstition; and make him more certain than ever that life was thus sifting

out for him the other names one by one, till at last no other name was left but — Irene.

Meanwhile, he carried ever in his heart a picture of what the girl answering to the name of Irene would be like. The name to him suggested a combination of tall lithe grace, exquisite refinement, blonde hair in coiled masses of gold, blue eyes domestically kind, a gift for arranging flowers — and a hundred other ideal characteristics which may best be symbolised by an Easter lily.

An Easter lily — with a light upon it seeming to fall from some hidden window in heaven: in fact a creature exquisitely blended of celestial purity and skillful house-wifery.

How much more the name Irene meant to him I need not say — because I cannot; for the name of every man's love is as we have quoted before, as that of Dante's Beatrice. She is called Jane or Elizabeth or Kate — or Irene — by those who know not wherefore. Only one man in the world knows why Jane is called Jane, only one man knows why Irene is called Irene.

The least superstitious must admit it strange that, with all his eager listening for his predestined name, even, one might say, with all his experimental pursuit of it, he never met it till at last. . . . . Well, I am anticipating. Being a man of leisure, he visited many countries, seeking his name; there was not a country of Europe in which he had not sought it, and even in Asia he had pursued it like a rare butterfly.

Common materialistic friends of his maintained that it was quite a common name. "If it be so common," he said, "how is it that in all my wanderings I have never yet met a woman with that name?"

At last a friend suggested that he had not tried America!

"America!" he exclaimed, "America! wonderful country I know — but is it likely that in so new a world, a world so busy making its own beautiful names, that I shall find this rare old name of an ancient world? Surely I might as well expect to dig up a Roman coin in some back garden in Omaha!"

"Never mind!" said the friend of my friend. "Try America."

So it was that my friend came at last to America, seeking his beautiful name.

Being a man of some public significance, he was asked, upon landing, what his business was in The Land of Promises; and, being a man of simple mind, he answered that he came seeking a woman of the name of — Irene. The assembled reporters shook their heads, and looked at him, as though he was crazy. No such name had ever been heard of in America. Of course, he was crazy; and so the papers had a day's fun with the eccentric Englishman, and then his numerous excellent introductions started him upon that most generous pilgrimage in the world — the pilgrimage of the American Continent.

His introductions, I say, were excellent. I wonder if that was the reason why, though the best and most beautiful homes of America were thus thrown open to him, visiting here and visiting there, he never once heard the name he was journeying to hear.

At length three months had gone by, and no name remotely resembling the name he loved had sounded in his ears. He was indeed planning to sail back to Europe in a few days, when in a great Western town — I may as well say Chicago — a circumstance occurred which changed his intention.

No one who has visited America can fail to have been struck by the number and quality of the beautiful homes, so generously thrown open to him, and by the singular purity of atmosphere which pervades them; a purity so entirely free from priggishness — no negative purity, but a purity which one might call elemental, a purity, so to say, of joyous power, a purity as full of laughter and strength as a racing upland breeze. One has sometimes heard that there is no American home. To one sojourner in America at least this means the strangest of misrepresentations; for, on the contrary, one might almost go so far as to say that in no other country in the world is there such a genuine home-life as in America. And I venture

to think that in no American city is this home-life to be found in fairer development than in Chicago. In such a home, one never-to-be-forgotten evening, my friend found himself a guest. Those who talk of American bad taste, of American ignorance of, or disregard for, the beautiful things of life should be taken to see that home. The gracious order of it, the unobtrusive richness, the organic beauty of it, as distinct from a conscious æstheticism, immediately impressed a nature very sensitive to such conditions; and the moment my friend met the only daughter of the household he knew at once from whom all this harmony proceeded. His host and hostess were charming simple people, the polo-playing son-and-heir was a delightful fellow; but it was evident that the harmony did not proceed from them.

No! it very evidently came from this tall, lithe girl, with that heavy crown of gold upon her head, those kind blue domestic eyes, and that supernal light upon her exquisitely blonde features. As my friend

looked at her, sitting by her side at the dinner-table, he felt that here at last was the woman he had been seeking so long, for, in every particular she answered to the dream of his long-sought Irene. In her father's introduction to him, however, he had not quite caught her name; so he sat through dinner in a fever of attention, hoping every moment to hear it pronounced again. But by one of those exceptions to the usual which do occur, no occasion for the direct use of her name occurred throughout the dinner, and he being as yet so new an acquaintance, and afraid besides lest he should hear the wrong name, had not courage to ask it. However, after dinner, it being a summer night, coffee was served on the veranda, and here he found both his courage and his opportunity. There was a sentimental crescent moon in the sky, and the veranda was filled with romantic lights and shadows. Miss Stanbery and my friend had found themselves a little away from the rest. She had seemed hardly less drawn to him than he to her, and

at last he felt that, without violating the proprieties of a guest, he might ask her Christian name.

She bent her beautiful head, with a lovely shyness, and answered that her name was —

"Ireen."

"Ireen?" said my friend, leaning toward her beauty in the twilight.

"It is a beautiful name."

To himself he was saying how strangely like, and yet how strangely unlike, it was to the name of which she seemed the ideal embodiment.

"Ireen," he said over to himself, and the drums of his ears almost chimed back — but alas! failed quite to chime.

"Ireen? Ireen?" he said over and over to himself, trying to make the name sound right, and, when he found it impossible, he looked again at her young loveliness, and wondered to himself if her name was not near enough to the name he loved.

But in the end his superstition prevailed, and reluctantly he bade good-bye to Ireen

Stanbery, and took train for New York, and boarded his liner, and sailed back to Europe sad at heart.

A year went by, and having given up all hopes of finding his Irene, he married, as I have said, a lady of the name of———, and was very happy — that is as happy as a man or woman can be who has married the wrong name.

He had been married about three years, when he chanced one evening to be dining in London with an American gentleman.

They compared notes on America.

"Do you know the Stanberys of Chicago?" asked my friend, among other questions.

"O yes! are n't they delightful people? And what a beautiful girl Irene is — she was married six months ago by the way."

"What name did you call her?" asked my friend.

"Irene."

"Irene! Why I thought they called her *Ireen!*"

"So they do — but did n't you know that

that is the American way of pronouncing 'Irene'?"

"Indeed, I did n't," gasped my friend, and in his soul he said "O that I had known!"

The moral of which is that it is very hard to lose one's love through a mispronunciation.

Revisiting the Glimpses of the Moon

REVISITING THE GLIMPSES OF THE MOON

SID NORTON could not recall a time when he had not been in love. From his earliest boyhood, falling in love had been a habit with him; and his heart, if he might be said to retain possession of an organ that was always being lost to some new face, was a sort of sentimental graveyard, a veritable necropolis of dead love-affairs — dead, but unforgotten; for, incorrigible lover as Sid was, his memory would sometimes go flitting from grave to grave, like a butterfly, philandering even with the past.

In spite of these excursions, and in defiance of the apparent paradox of the statement, Sid Norton found himself in love — for the first and last time. This he said of himself gravely, not only in private to the lady who was credited with this marvel but

also in public to his intimate friends. He said it, and there was no doubt that he meant it.

Now Rosamund Lowther was an exceedingly clever young woman, an adept in the management of the emotional male, and easily Sid Norton's match in experienced flirtation. The friends of both watched the progress of their sudden volcanic attachment with cynical expectancy, and when, after six months of a trance-like courtship, during which it might be said that the infatuated pair had never taken their eyes off each other, Sid Norton suddenly sailed for Europe, you can imagine the sensation and comment it caused. Neither vouchsafed any explanation; their engagement remained intact, at all events there was no formal bulletin to the contrary; and the thing was a piquant mystery to all but the two concerned. For them it was their whimsical secret.

One late summer afternoon a week or two before, the two enamoured ones had been seated side by side in the old orchard of the Lowther country home. Both were very

evidently happy, but Sid's face was absolutely idiotic with bliss. The something so "utter" in Sid's look touched Rosamund's elfish sense of humour, and, though she was just as much in love herself, she could not refrain from a gay little teasing laugh.

"Is he so happy, little boy?" she said, lifting up his chin, and looking whimsically into his face.

Sid's answer was silent and long, and when it was ended, Rosamund continued, holding his face at arm's length, and looking into it with quizzical seriousness.

"But, aren't you just a little frightened sometimes?"

"Frightened?"

"Yes! when you think that — it 's for *life!*"

"Ah! thank God," answered Sid rapturously.

"No, but think — for life! No more pretty flirtations, no more butterfly by-paths — only me — *me* — till the end. Be honest — does n't that make cold shivers run up and down your back?"

"You angel," exclaimed the abject one, attempting to answer her as before.

"No, no; listen to me. I am serious. Do you realise that you are in a cage, my cage, for life — that escape is impossible — that it will be in vain to beat on the bars — that only I have the key — that you are there for better or for worse — that you are there, I repeat, for life — that there is no help for it —nothing to do but make the best of it— do you realise that?"

The sense of certitude, of absolute possession, which Rosamund, comedian as she was, infused into her voice, was irresistible, and Sid laughed, laughed for joy that the girl he loved had such attractive brains as well.

"What a delightful fancy!" he exclaimed.

"Fancy, do you call it? Try and escape, my boy, and you will see how much of a fancy it is."

"Divine, adorable fact, of course, I mean. O Rosamund, how glad I am that it is true. Let us take the key and throw it into the river. I never want to be free again as long as I live!"

"No use if you did!" with a saucy toss of the confident little head.

"My poor boy," she went on presently, in a caressing motherly tone, "I really can't help being rather sorry for you, you who have been so used to your freedom; you such a wicked, wicked wanderer. How will you ever endure it? Tell me the truth now — man to man, as they say — right at the bottom of your heart, are n't you just a tiny bit wistful sometimes for the old freedom?"

"Never," answered Sid, with portentous sincerity.

"Never! Quite sure? Don't you ever feel a little homesick for some one of your old loves, and wonder what it would be like to see her again?"

Sid shook his head with emphasis.

Rosamund, and for that matter, all Sid's world, was well acquainted with the main lines of his amatorious history, and knew something of the various divinities who had figured in it. Besides, Sid, a promising young lawyer, with known literary leanings, had

put his heart on record beyond withdrawal by the publication of a volume of verse entitled "The Nine Muses." The volume consisted of love-verses addressed to various ladies to whom Sid had from time to time, or simultaneously, been devoted; and though, of course, they figured under fanciful names, their identities were no secret to the learned gossips of Sid's circle. This book had been a thorn in Sid's side since he had met and loved Rosamund, a thorn which she sometimes amused herself by using to his discomfiture. She had the volume with her this afternoon, and as she turned to it, with malicious merriment in her eye, Sid knew that she meditated some of her merciless raillery.

"I do wish, Rosamund, you would let me forget that wretched book. I wish it were at the bottom of the sea. I'll have the whole edition destroyed. I will, to-morrow. . . . ."

"O that would be sacrilege!" interrupted Rosamund, mockingly; "besides, I should still have my copy."

"I will manage to get it from you," retorted Sid, making a clutch at his printed past.

"Even if you should," answered Rosamund, retaining possession of the book, "I should still remember some of the poems by heart. They are so beautiful. . . . . This, for instance, to 'Myrtilla' . . . ."

"Do be quiet, Rosamund. . . . ."

"No, I insist, ... I don't think you know how beautiful they are yourself. Listen:

I know a little starlit spring—
  Last night I leaned upon the brink,
And to the dimpled surface pressed
  My hallowed lips to drink.

And now the sun is up, and I
  Am with a dream athirst;
O was it good to drink that spring,
  Or was the spring accurst?

Accurst, that he who drinks therein
  Shall long, even as I,
To drink again, yet never drink
  Again until he die.

"Truly now," Rosamund continued, "does n't hearing that make you a bit thirsty again for your little starlit spring? It is not

too late. I am sure that if you were to go back to her, she would let you drink all you want. . . . . I happen to know that she is n't married yet?"

Sid sat dumb under the raillery, with set, gloomy face. Turning over a page or two, Rosamund began again.

"Here is one of my favourites," she said, ignoring Sid's silence. "It is to Meriel:

Was there a moon in the sky,
  Was there a wind in the tree,
I only remember that you and I
  Sat somewhere with you and me.

I only remember the joy — the joy —
  And the ache of going away:
O little girl, here 's a little boy
  Will love you till Judgment Day."

As she finished reading this, Rosamund let the book close in her lap, and her mood seemed suddenly to have changed to a thoughtful seriousness. She repeated, as if to herself, the last two lines.

"O little girl, here 's a little boy
  Will love you till Judgment Day—"

she said over slowly, as though weighing every word; and there was something in her voice that might have suggested that in playfully pressing this thorn into Sid's side, she had unexpectedly pricked herself. Sid sat on in the same attitude of patient gloom. Presently, observing her silence, he turned to her.

"Are you finished?" he said.

"Yes!" she answered. "Yes!" with a certain aloofness in her voice, which Sid, with the painful sensitiveness of a lover, did not miss.

"Is there anything the matter?" he asked.

"No," she answered, speaking slowly, and with the same serious quietness of tone, as though she were thinking hard. "No! but I've got an idea. That last poem has set me thinking. . . . ."

"Curse the poem," exclaimed Sid desperately, seizing hold of the volume.

"You can take it," said Rosamund, to his surprise, "I don't think I want to see it again either."

"But surely, you are not allowing it to

trouble you. It is all past and gone, and one cannot have reached thirty without some experiences. Even you, dear. . . . ."

"O yes, I know, but there's a peculiarly deep ring about those last two lines, Sid —

> O little girl, here's a little boy
> Will love you till Judgment day —

whatever you may say, you meant them pretty badly, Sid," she added, turning upon him eyes whose recent mirth was replaced by a questioning gravity.

"Of course I meant them at the time, or thought I meant them. Besides, poetry always exaggerates," answered Sid, writhing with explanation.

"No, Sid, don't belittle your old feelings. That does n't help. Rather the reverse," and then once more she repeated the lines musingly as if to herself. Then she turned to Sid with a sudden decision of manner, as if her mind was made up.

"Sid, that was a very deep feeling. How do you know that it is not still alive?"

Sid made the usual despairing protestations. Rosamund regarded them but little.

"I wonder," she continued, "if you really know your own mind. I wonder. You think you love me now, but then you thought you loved her then — till Judgment Day. Sid! Now see, I'm going to tell you my idea. . . . ."

Sid looked at her expectantly, waiting with anxious eyes. Then, with something of a return to her gayer manner, she went on:

"You remember what we were saying just now about your cage. Well, I'm going to let you out for a month or two."

She waved aside a remonstrant ejaculation from Sid.

"Yes! and you are to spend the last breath of freedom in finding out if there is still any truth left in these old impassioned statements. That is, you will go to Myrtilla, and see if you still want to drink of that 'little starlit spring,' and you will go to Meriel and see, well . . . . about Judgment Day! And, while you are on pilgrimage, there are one or

two other 'muses' it might be well to make quite sure about."

Sid interrupted with impatient incredulity, not believing her serious. But the more he expostulated, the firmer she became.

"I declare, the idea grows on me!" she said. "I wonder it never occurred to me before. Now that it has, I must insist on your carrying it out — for my sake. When I think of your nature, in the light of all this printed experience, I should not really feel safe otherwise. Of course, your cage is strong, I know. So long as I care to keep the key, your escape is impossible. But then, I should not like to find some day in the future, that, secure as you were, you were in secret pining to be off after some little starlit spring on the other side of the bars. So, Sid, I 'm sorry, but you must pack up right away, and go on pilgrimage."

In vain Sid protested that it was preposterous, that he was incapable of seriously undertaking any such fanciful absurdity. Rosamund remained obdurate. She would

never marry him, she said, till he had subjected himself to the proposed ordeal.

"Besides, if you refuse," she continued, "I shall always feel that you were afraid of it, secretly afraid that the temptations of it would be too strong for your faith."

To this Sid made a singularly blundering retort, which he tried in vain to take back as he uttered it, to the effect that, however certain one was of one's love, there was no sense in playing with fire. This settled the matter.

"Fire!" laughed Rosamund mercilessly — he admitted the danger then!

After that there was no argument — and this is the explanation of Sid Norton's sudden departure for Europe.

Say what you will, the test was a little unfair. So Sid Norton said to himself, as he paced the moonlit deck in mid-ocean, and strove to analyse his feelings toward the situation in which Rosamund's whim had placed him. He thought of the lady of old

time who had thrown her glove into the arena. Of course, no lover could decline such a challenge . . . . but he hastily dismissed the image as unfortunate, for he was not allowed to admit the existence of the lions. To recognise any possibility of danger in his present so-called ordeal was in itself an unfaithfulness. To admit that there was any element of an ordeal in his fantastic adventure was to fail right away. To confess any temptation in the circumstances was a sufficient backsliding. And yet would any man in a like situation, dealing honestly with his own thoughts, declare confidently that there was no danger here to a true love? The answer of theory and idealism would of course be that there could evidently be none. The words "true love" imply that, and a certain old writer has disparaged "a fugitive and cloistered virtue" that shrinks from taking the open field against temptation. Which is all very beautiful, but another saying as to the relation of discretion to valour comes nearer to the truth of a human nature, which,

with the best will in the world, is apt to be sorely tripped up in the very moment of its strength by some half-forgotten weakness.

Sid Norton's love for Rosamund Lowther was no less real and deep than he deemed it. She was for him the divine event toward which his whole life had deviously moved. To lose her love would be loss irremediable. She was that final joy and enchantment which he had pursued from face to face, yet found only at last in hers. She was the fairy tale of life come true. He had no wish, no hope, no aim, beyond her. With his meeting her life had at last seriously begun. Its future success was to be the making perfect this love which she had brought him. This was the serious truth about Sid Norton; it represented the serious responsible self which had at length asserted its domination over the warring minor selves that had preceded it — the self he seriously wished to go on being. But alas! in this multiple being called man those minor selves, though conquered and perhaps mortally wounded, are

apt to die hard, and occasionally one of them, in a last dying flash of vitality, will gain the upper hand, and, in some fleeting but fatal moment, tragically belie the self that is real and lasting. Sid, who was learned in his own psychology, knew himself, or rather him-selves, too well to be vaingloriously confident that no such disastrous aberration on the part of one or other of his dead or dying selves might not in some unguarded moment betray him. He did not, of course, seriously fear it, and it seemed impossible indeed, as out there on the midnight ocean he lifted up his eyes to the moon, as though she were the silver spirit of his love.

Still, like a wise soldier, he prayed hard that night not to be led into temptation.

In this spirit of discreet valour, he had, on embarking, after making a survey of his fellow-passengers, congratulated himself on the singular unseductiveness of the array feminine. As in the days of Odysseus, the siren remains one of the most dreaded dangers of those that go down to the sea in ships, and

Sid's previous crossings had not been uneventful in this respect.

On coming on deck rather late next forenoon, Sid was immediately aware, before he traced his impression to its cause, of a subtle attractive change in the human atmosphere — just, as in early spring, suddenly, one morning, we come out into the air, and know, before we have seen them, that there are flowers in the garden. So poor Sid's terribly sensitive instinct warned him immediately of the unexpected presence of a beautiful woman. Casting his eyes along the prosaic line of deck chair mummies, he saw that his instinct had not been at fault. A beautiful woman had blossomed there in the night. With the vividness of almond stars among the bare boughs, she shone among the other passengers, an apparition of fragrance, all dew and danger. One of the chairs had remained vacant up till this morning. It was the chair next to Sid's own, and it was with a quick thrill in which pleasure was quaintly blended with alarm, that he realised that it

was in this chair that the apparition was sitting.

"So it is," sighed Sid, with an inward smile, "that heaven leads us not into temptation."

He did not seat himself at once, but walked the deck several turns, partly to reconnoitre the fair enemy, and partly with the heroic resolve of seeking out the deck steward and having his chair removed to a less perilous position. This extreme measure, however, struck him as both eccentric as well as cowardly, and the reconnaissance finally decided the matter. After all, the voyage so far had been dull enough, and his love for Rosamund surely called for no such fanatical self-denial.

So presently he found himself seated by the side of the apparition, pleasantly enveloped in a delicate exhalation of violets, and luxuriously conscious of the proximity of a beautiful, breathing woman. For a while the first conventional reserves protected him. He took up his book and appeared absorbed in it. She, too, was reading. One

of those modern novels sufficiently artistic and emotionally speculative to arouse one's interest in the personality of its reader, and to afford a ready freemasonry of communication between strangers not unwilling to make each other's acquaintance.

After a brief preoccupation with literature, both readers lost interest in their books at the same moment, and both, with a bored sigh, allowed them to decline upon their steamer-rug knees, with an artfully synchronised sympathy. Then their eyes met, and two of a kind recognised each other and smiled. Nature had created them fully equipped flirts. They only needed to look at each other to know it; and, straightway, headlong, with the good excuse of marine ennui upon them, they followed the law of their natures — Sid, however, with a strong brake on, a restraint, which, with the comprehension of sorceresses, his companion felt and interpreted, and inwardly resolved to overcome.

"Strange, how everything is a bore at sea!

even the most interesting book," said the siren.

"Even the sea," assented Sid.

"Have you really the courage to say that you think the sea ridiculously overrated?"

Sid had.

"I love courage," she answered, looking at him in a laughing, challenging way.

"You necessitate it," was the answer, according to the eternal formula; and so the sea began to be less of a bore, and continued being less and less so each succeeding day, till the last evening of the voyage had come.

They were nearing the sad shores of the shamrock, and they had escaped from the after-dinner promenade, and had made themselves cosey near the bow of the ship, in some nook of windlass and sailing tackle close to the bulwark, where they could watch the phosphorescent spume of the ship's course, and speak of it, if necessary.

So far, though not entirely satisfied with himself, Sid had combined faithfulness with flirtation in a blending so adroit that the ache

of his conscience was just bearable; and, he told himself, that Rosamund, of all women, would be the last to withhold her admiration from so brilliant a feat of sentimental tight-rope walking. Any student of the *ars amatoria* knows how fine is the line between faithfulness and unfaithfulness, finer far than a hair from the beloved's head; and Sid had the right to congratulate himself with his deft-footed adhesion to that moonbeam of a path. The siren was too expert herself in such perilous experiment not to have observed and admired Sid's achievement, and, naturally, she was piqued by it to a special effort of conquest this last evening. Not, of course, that she really cared for Sid, any more than he cared for her. It was merely two flirts making a trial of strength, the old eternal duel between man and woman; but, for once, the man had most to lose — and that Sid kept reiterating to himself: for this momentary diversion he might lose Rosamund, lose his whole life, and the meaning of it — for this!

The siren, who had not known him for three days without knowing all about him, estimated accurately with what she had to contend. For the woman flirt there is no incentive like — Another Woman! It was not this quite attractive man whose scalp she was after. It was the woman to whom he was so ridiculously constant that she burned to humiliate.

Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way. I said that the line is fine, and often, to sincere observers, the adherence to it has a somewhat technical value. Was it casuistry or simplicity in Sid that made him feel that his faith was still intact so long as he had not actually — kissed the siren? We live in a legal, concrete world, a world that judges us by our definite completed actions rather than by our feelings, or our cunningly restricted evasions of the penalty. A kiss — whatever the motive — is a concrete decisive act. A kiss is evidence. The desire to kiss, however powerful, is not. Now Sid had not yet kissed the siren. According to any

external tribunal, Sid was still faithful to his Rosamund.

This unkissed kiss, so to say, was the key of the castle; at all events from the siren's point of view. Sid's heart, to tell the truth, ached with a sincerer standard; but, at all events, be its value what it might, this unkissed kiss was the redoubt on which he had hoisted his colours, to fly or fall. And it was to be no easy fight, he realised, as the siren nestled herself into a comfortable position in that sheltered nook of windlass and sailing-tackle, and phosphorescence and gold-dust stars, and the importunate surge of the sea.

He braced himself with the thought of Rosamund as with a prayer. He crossed himself with the remembrance of his last look as they had parted. It may sound laughable that anyone should arm himself so cap-à-pie against a kiss, yet the stakes in any contest are represented by some apparently trivial symbol. A kiss was the symbol here; and the siren, at all events, did not underrate its symbolic value. She fought for it as

though it had been the cross of the Legion of Honour, fought with all the delicate skill of an artist, and she laughed softly now and again as she came near winning, winning — the kiss that belonged to another woman.

She was terribly beautiful was the siren, terribly everything that a seductive woman can be. The atmosphere about her was a dreamy whirlpool, of which the vortex was her lips, and Sid felt himself being drawn closer and closer to that vortex. How he longed to throw up his arms and drown — but, instead, suddenly, brusquely, rudely, he sprang up.

"I won't," he cried abruptly, and left her.

It was not gracefully done, but it was the only way he could do it. Victories are seldom graceful. In the thick of battle it is occasionally necessary to be impolite. Suddenly Sid had seen, as it were, luridly embodied the moment he had told himself might some day come — the moment of temptation. Here was he face to face with it at last, one of those terrible moments of

trial which divide the past from the future, and challenge us to decide then and there, once and for all, what we really mean about ourselves; one of those moments that cannot be postponed, but must be met and fought just how and when they come; and, as Sid realised all the moment meant, those perfumed alluring lips so dangerously near to his filled him with a veritable terror, and his heart almost stopped beating with dread of succumbing. Poor Sid, he had been so accustomed to take such kisses as they came with a light heart; but now suddenly, as in a lightning flash, he seemed to see the meaning of those mysterious standards by which the faith of men and women has been immemorially judged, a meaning he had never suspected before; and he saw, too, the divine beauty of them; and the vivid revelations thus made to him, not a moment too soon, had given him that strength to cry out "I won't," and tear himself away.

As with a burning heart, he arraigned himself before himself in the solitude of his

stateroom, it seemed at first that his victory had been but a poor one, a victory only in name. He had desired to kiss the siren — it was impossible to deny that; and surely the very wish to do so was unfaithfulness; and the only reason that had restrained him — was it not the fear of losing Rosamund? No, it was more than that, and with the realisation that it was really more than that — a real aspiration, however feeble, toward the better way of loving, a repugnance for the old way, and a genuine preference, very young and tender indeed as yet, for a finer ideal — he grew a little comforted. Yes, it had been a victory, a greater one than it had seemed. He had not really wanted to kiss the siren, after all, in spite of compromising appearances — not really deep down. It was only an old habit of the surface that had momentarily got the better of him! And, though it may sound like casuistry, it was not so. Poor boy, it might not have seemed a brilliant victory to the looker-on. But flirtation is a habit that dies hard, and, till he had known

Rosamund, the mere idea of faithfulness to a woman had never remotely entered into his mind. This passage with the siren, however, had proved him so far on the road to regeneration as to have developed an actual preference for being faithful! He was himself surprised at the feeling, and it filled him with a certain awe, made him almost a little frightened, though curiously happy. Did he really love one woman like that at last? Just one woman, out of all the women in the world? Yes, just one woman. It was a wonderful feeling.

The temptation of the siren had been the gross one of the senses. The finer and subtler trial had yet to come. Rosamund had so far compromised with her original decree as to consent to limit Sid's ordeal to one out of his nine muses. She would be content, she said, with his seeing Meriel, she, whom you may remember he was to love till Judgment Day; for Rosamund was right in thinking that, of all Sid's previous feelings, his love

for Meriel had been most serious. Indeed, it had been a feeling apart from all others, and it had always shone wistfully in Sid's memory as a lost sacred thing that had come into his life too early, before his heart had been ready for it. A magic gift of loving it had been, but he had taken it carelessly with the rest, and realised all it had been only when it was far away. He recalled looks out of Meriel's eyes which told him long after that she had known he was not ready for the love she could give him, and, unconsciously, the occasional thought of this old shortcoming of his had prepared him for — Rosamund, of whom Meriel came to seem in his mind a beautiful prophecy. Thus old love dies that new may live, or rather lives on in giving its life to the new. Certainly, Sid could never have loved Rosamund more had he not loved Meriel so much.

Yet, what if it should prove that Rosamund in her turn had only been developing him toward repossession of his old dream! Love moves in a mysterious way. How

strange if this interval of experience had been meant to bring him back, at last worthy of them, to Meriel's arms at last. He could not deny that his love for Rosamund had been haunted sometimes by moonlit memories of Meriel's face, though he could with equal truth say that the new love was greater than the old one, because of its inclusion of stable human elements which his fairy dream of Meriel had lacked. Meriel had been a dream-woman, but hardly a human woman; but Rosamund was both. Yet, almost without his knowing it, there had been lurking in the background of his consciousness a vague curiosity — it was hardly more — as to what it would seem like to see Meriel again; what her face would seem like, how her voice would sound. He did not for a moment fear the result, yet he sometimes felt that he would like to try the experiment; but all these feelings had been of the very shadowiest, hardly rippling the surface of consciousness; so when Rosamund had suddenly made her odd proposal, they had seemed phantom

nothings indeed compared with the aching reality of a month's exile from her side.

All that had been Meriel had passed into Sid's love for Rosamund. Meriel herself could only be a ghost, however beautifully visible and audible, a fair house of dreams from which the dreams had departed. Yet, for all that, it was not without some agitation that Sid found himself at length in the quaint little seaside town, whence a ferryboat would take him to a village across the bay, high over which Meriel and her mother lived, looking over the sea. Her ghost began to grow more and more luminous with memories, as a pale moon fills with silver as the night deepens. He stood on the deck of the little boat, and as it drew near to the landing-place he could see clearly on the hillside the old white house with its trellises and its terraced gardens descending the hill. He could see plainly the little bower where one summer evening they had sat together, and she had suddenly put her hand in his and said, "My life is in your hands."

His heart beat fast as his memories crowded in upon him, and it made him almost frightened to think that in a few short moments he would really be looking at her again. He felt as though he were about to see someone who had been dead a long time, and had come to life again startlingly, as in dreams. Then there suddenly floated over the water from the village music very mournful and sweet, and he could see a long line of dark figures moving slowly up the tortuous village street. At the first strains of the music a great foreboding had swept through Sid's heart. What if Meriel were dead, and, as in a fairy tale, he had come to meet her — carried through the streets to the tomb. The idea pleased his fancy, with its picturesque pathos; but no! that music was not for Meriel. It was a soldier's death music, yet its solemn valedictory chords seemed to Sid's ears to be playing the requiem of a great passion, fitly ushering him with their voluptuous melancholy to the grave of his beautiful love.

He took his way thoughtfully up through

the climbing village, but there was a subdued excitement in his face which Rosamund might have construed as an undue eagerness to face his coming ordeal. At last he turned the well-known corner of the lane, and there was the house, facing the aery infinite of the sea. How poignantly familiar it all was; yet, why instantly did something tell him, something blank about the expression of the very windows, that — Meriel was not there.

Her mother met him as he turned into the garden, but Meriel was not there. She had been married — yesterday.

That is what the music had meant.

"So 'Judgment Day' is married!" said Rosamund, when Sid had once more returned to his cage to report himself. "It 's too bad of her," she continued, "for she has quite spoiled my little plan. My test has been no test at all."

"It was all I needed," answered Sid. He was thinking of the siren, about whom, like

a wise lover, he had kept silence. Too much confession is a dangerous weakness, and we are usually the best judges of our own actions. The siren had been but the process of an experiment. All that concerned Rosamund was the result.

"I wish I could have seen you, Sid, when you heard about 'Judgment Day.' I 'd give anything to know what you really felt; but, of course, you 'll never tell me."

Sid smiled, but said nothing.

"Were n't you disgusted with her for daring to do it without your consent? The bare idea of a woman who had loved you daring to have any new life on her own account! I am sure you had pictured her spending her days looking dreamily over the sea — waiting for your return. I know you had."

As a matter of fact Sid had, and his feelings on hearing of Meriel's marriage had been exceedingly mixed. It was perhaps as well that Rosamund had no record of them.

"Won't you tell me what you really felt —

just for fun? You can be honest, I shan't mind."

But Sid was too wise to be honest. He knew where these heart-to-heart confessions, just for fun, were apt to lead.

"I had no feelings. My one thought from beginning to end was to get back to my cage — and never go out of it again."

"You were relieved then? You had been a little frightened, eh? Yes, you know you had, and you were glad to be let off the ordeal — now, were n't you?"

Sid certainly had been, but he steadily refused to be drawn. And then Rosamund suddenly changed her tactics.

"But you have n't asked anything about me during your retrospective pilgrimage!" she said.

"You!" exclaimed Sid, a look of peculiarly masculine surprise coming into his face.

"O yes, me! I suppose you imagined me during your absence sitting here, *à la* 'Judgment Day,' docilely awaiting your return."

"What do you mean, Rosamund?" asked Sid, anxiously.

"I mean that you seem to forget that I, too, had made previous engagements for Judgment Day. When you were off pilgrimaging in the past — what was to hinder me from doing the same?"

"O Rosamund, you did n't."

"Did n't I! I 'd often wondered what it would be like to kiss Jack Meriden again, so your being away on your own affairs gave me a good opportunity."

"You kissed him!" exclaimed Sid, in angry astonishment, all his masculine proprietorship in his face.

"Why not!" she answered, nodding her head affirmatively.

"You — kissed — him," Sid repeated, grasping her wrists fiercely.

Rosamund shook herself free, with mocking laughter.

"Ah! there talks the man — the lord of creation. The man is to be allowed to go off and flirt with whom he pleases, but the

woman, O no! While the man is engaged in these pleasing diversions, she must sit at home faithfully darning his socks. No, sir! I did kiss Jack Meriden, and it was a very nice kiss, too."

"You did," repeated Sid slowly, in an anguish of jealousy.

"You must remember, Sid," she answered mockingly, "what a serious affair it was between us — quite a Judgment-Day affair. Those old memories die hard, as you, of all people, should know."

"I only know that you — kissed — Jack — Meriden," repeated Sid, rising to his feet; "and that I am going."

He strode savagely across the lawn, making as if to leave the garden. Rosamund let him go some distance, and then called him back.

"Why should I come back?" he asked, sulkily.

"I want to tell you something," she said in a caressing voice.

He came back to her side, and stood there.

"Well, what is it?" he asked stiffly.

"You must sit down. I can't tell you that way."

Sid sat down, with non-committal aloofness. She put her arm around his rigid shoulders, and whispered.

"You are the greatest goose that ever lived. I never kissed Jack Meriden. I love you — not as a man loves, but as a woman loves."

"I love you the same way," answered Sid, the storm-clouds suddenly swept from his face, "there is only one way of — loving. The other thing needs another name."

And, with that, Rosamund snapped to the door of his cage forever.

Eva, the Woodland and I

EVA, THE WOODLAND AND I

WHENEVER I ought to be working especially hard at my desk in the middle of the woodland, where I have built myself a little log house for my books, and my pictures and my pen — because the household down at the bottom of the hill does not want a man indoors writing all day when there are all kinds of important domestic operations afoot, which, when he is there, have to be done softly, with hushed voices and muffled tread, lest the serenity of the great brain with the pen be ruffled — whenever, I say, I ought to be working especially hard up there in the wood, among the pines and the bracken and the dancing leaves and the whistle of birds that seem to call, "What a sin it is to be working on such a day!" there often comes a tiny figure and looks in at the window with three-year-old baby eyes, and watches the

mysterious person there at the desk, with, for all her affected innocent look, a definite purpose of seduction in her baby heart. I know too well what she is up to. It is a day all aromatic sunshine, and she wants us to play truant together, hunting butterflies and wild flowers, instead of having to behave properly with nurse, and sitting there at that stupid desk.

She knows perfectly well that she is doing the sweet forbidden thing, for her mother has impressed upon her again and again, with much solemnity, that she must on no account interrupt father when he is busy — on masterpieces. Eva has always listened with an air of enigmatic innocence on her little broad indomitable face. Her blue eyes have worn a look of what I might call stubborn obedience, and then — Well, I am sorry to say that on the first opportunity, when nurse's back is turned, she has made off as fast as her sturdy little legs will carry her, up among the secrecies of the fern, till at last she has arrived at my window — a

baby Eve, offering me the wild apple of idleness and sunshine.

I pretend not to see, I bow my head more sternly over my task in profound absorption; but Eva is not to be taken in by such cheap devices. She knows that she has only to stand long enough at the window — cleverly making no sign, not tapping or calling, but just silently there — for me to give in, and, throwing down my pen, catch her in my arms and carry her up to the gorse-lit moorland that spreads its boundless horizon at the top of our little wood.

The sun has been calling me all day, and the leaves have been whispering invitations upon the pane; but I have found it comparatively easy to resist them. The eternal temptation of the birds calling and calling me away I have steeled my heart to resist also. But Eva! No, I cannot resist her. So, after a sham fight of a few moments, she and I are on our way up the woods as fast as we can, for fear nurse or mother may catch sight of us before we really escape.

But for one particular day, of which at the moment I am thinking, I am afraid I cannot lay the blame on her. No, it was all my fault. I believe that that day she had meant to be a really good girl. I must take the blame of luring her from her arduous duties with her dolls. And yet I cannot blame myself very sincerely; for the forenoon had been so full of sunshine and wafting perfume that I could not have regarded myself as a human being had I stayed at my desk, merely writing, while the sun was shining and the birds singing and the wild-rose opening its dewy heart to the sky.

Deliberately I had decided that I would not work, and strolled up through the green, sun-ascending perfumes to the gorse and heather at the top of the pine wood. As I emerged into the broad, brooding sunshine, a swift rustle stirred in the underbrush, and a zigzag of silver flashed away from my feet, threshing its way, with sinuous, sinister beauty, to shelter in an old bank hard by. I

had disturbed an adder taking his noonday sun bath.

Snakes are hardly more common in England than they are said to be in the island of Saint Patrick. When occasionally surprised, they startle one with something like the thrill of an apparition, something of the fear and fascination of the supernatural. They seem to belong to the beautiful wicked side of nature, that at once repels and ensnares. Though I had lived much in the country, I had not previously seen three snakes in my life; so this fleeing, flashing adder was quite an event in my morning's walk, and my first thought was: If only Eva were here to see it too!

Presently the adder himself gave me my opportunity, by gliding into a hole in the bank, from which there was no outlet except by the way he had entered. I could see him sitting there coiled in the darkness, with his vicious head erect, ready, tiny worm, after all, as he was, to fight the whole big world. He sat there and watched me, unmoving;

and then, noticing a big stone that lay near, I closed with it the door of his little cave, and made his imprisonment safe with earth. Then I went down the wood again to bring Eva. I caught sight of her through the garden hedge, sitting on the grass playing with alphabetical bricks. Nurse sat a short way off sewing.

Nurse is such an old friend of ours and so clothed with vice-maternal authority that I am almost as much afraid of her in regard to Eva's and my truancies as I am of Eva's mother. Men rightly enough, by natural law, are allowed little to say in the rearing of their own babies, and, however much the master of the house you may deem yourself, your authority stops with the good woman who guards your child. There is something sacred about a nurse — a mother nurse, I mean; not a nursemaid — which it would be profanity, even impertinence, for a mere father to disregard. When the mother is not there, the nurse is the mother, and her word is law.

Realising this, I could not dare openly to cross the lawn and take Eva away with me, as though I had every right to do so. Had I dared to do that, I should have been speedily humiliated by that mysterious authority which is said to rock the cradle and to rule the world. In other words, nurse and I would have had a spirited fight, in which I would have been speedily worsted.

Therefore, I lay in ambush a while behind the hedge of flowering laurel, wondering how to catch Eva's attention. Presently I found a simple way. Within reach of my hand grew a red rose bush, weighted with fat, heavy roses. One of these I plucked, and threw it with a dexterity on which I prided myself right into Eva's lap. If there is one thing I love about her, it is the calm way she takes surprises. She looked silently at the rose a moment, then with her strong, quiet eyes gazed around to see where it could have come from. As she did that, I gently shook the rose-bush. She watched it shaking a moment, and then caught sight of me.

Even then she kept her presence of mind; but an indefinable twinkle in her eyes, momentarily illuminating her little imperturbable baby face, telegraphed to me that she had understood.

Fortunately for us, nurse was not only deep in her sewing, but deep in some old memories, so that she did not miss Eva till we were both safe together on the woodland side of the garden hedge. Once safe there, we made haste to cover as fast as possible, and, when we had reached one of our secret hiding places in a little hollow of fern surrounded by birches, I set Eva down and told her to wait there and play with the sunbeams, while I ran back down the hill for something which, it had just occurred to me, might make us a little more fun in our truancy. This was nothing more wonderful than a wide-mouthed glass jar, once poignant with pickles, which surreptitiously I procured from the cook with fear and trembling, and the purpose of which will soon appear. Returning up the wood, I found Eva contemplating the red rose I had

thrown to her with a quite philosophical absorption.

"Daddy," she said, "why are some roses red and some white?"

It was the ancient unanswerable question of the mystery of colour. Who is there that has answered or can answer it? A mother might have done better, but what could a mere father do but temporise?

"I will tell you, Eva," I said, "when you can tell me why sister's hair is black and yours is golden."

This sibylline answer, I was relieved to find, made a profound impression upon Eva, and as we continued up the wood she was evidently pondering it in the unfathomable deeps of her baby brain. Her meditation, however, soon gave place to curiosity and questioning about everything that grew or sang or moved in the wood. Every child is a naturalist, and the great charm of naturalists is that they always remain children, never losing their sense of wonder at the little elusive things that run and hop and chirp in

the grass, or float flower-like upon the air. The naturalist has come nearer to the secret of eternal youth — which is mainly eternal enthusiasm — than any poet, and he who at fifty still pursues a rare species with unabated ardour need never fear old age.

I can make no pretense of being a learned naturalist, and the names of many a bird and flower I love often escape me — as one often forgets the name of some charming acquaintance, whom none the less one is delighted to meet again. I am content to go up the wood in entire ignorance of the Latin and even English names of the various presences that fill it with leafage and perfume and song; but Eva is of a different temper. She is an exact scientist, and insists on knowing the name and the how and the why of every leaf and flower and insect that crosses our path. She even expects me to know what the birds are saying, as though I were the old Virgilian Asylas, who talked the language of birds as easily as some old scholar can read Latin; or Melapus:

With love exceeding a simple love of the things
That glide in grasses and rubble of woody wreck;
Or change their perch on a beat of quivering wings
From branch to branch, only restful to pipe and peck.

When I am a little indefinite in my explanations, she gives me a look which makes me tremble for her continued belief in my omniscience; and so, when for the third time she asked me what a certain bird was saying, I felt that I must do something to retain her respect. So I extemporised.

"This is what he is saying," I answered: "Be quick — Be quick — Be quick — Quick! Be quick! . . . . Sweet! — Sweet! — Sweet! . . . . Sweet-i-ki! — Sweet-i-ki! — Sweet-i-ki! . . . . Chuck-chuck! — Twe-ey — Twe-ey — Twe-ey!"

This translation seemed entirely satisfactory to Eva, and she made me repeat it several times, so that with her rapacious baby memory she might get it by heart.

She presently disconcerted me, however, by asking me to tell her what that other bird on the bough there was saying.

"It does n't sound the same as the other," she said, or meant in more babylike words. (The realism of baby talk I am obliged to leave to greater writers.)

"It means just the same, though," I said. "All the birds are saying the same thing, only they say it in different languages."

I must explain that Eva has been somewhat of a traveller, and realises that you can ask for the same thing in English, French, or Italian. Therefore, the explanation seemed to bring her some, though I could see not entire, conviction.

However, I was saved further embarrassment by our arriving at our scene of operations. Really I don't know which of us was more quietly excited as we stood in front of the bank where the angry little prisoner churned his venom in the darkness. Eva, who had been given an illustrated natural history for a present the Christmas before,

was evidently expecting a boa constrictor — that, or a beautiful serpent, such as a luridly pictured Bible sent her by a pious aunt had taught her to associate with the garden of Eden.

With almost as much caution as though Eva's imaginations were likely to be realised, and some winged dragon snorting flame was ready to leap out upon us, I removed the stone and peered into the tiny dungeon, Eva standing at my side, her blue eyes serious with expectancy. Yes, my prisoner was still there! Apparently he had not moved since I had shut him in, and his small wicked eyes gleamed at me with concentrated hate out of the darkness. He showed no disposition to escape, so there was no difficulty in my using my glass pickle jar, as I had proposed to myself when I stole with it from the kitchen.

Placing its broad mouth in the entrance to the little cave, I banked it securely round with earth; Eva, meanwhile, an admiring, mystified spectator. Thus the adder had no choice but to stay where he was or to

remove into the glass jar, the hospitality of which, however, he showed no disposition to accept. He still sat on, mystic, unmoving, making no sign. Eva and I watched him a long while in silence, and then at length, his immobility growing monotonous, I cut a stout twig from a neighbouring bush, and, pushing it through the soft earth at the side of the jar, poked him gently with it. Even then he would not stir, but his black tongue went in and out of his tiny jaws like black lightning. There was something quite pathetic in his miniature fury at this indignity being put upon him.

"My! but he is cross! Is n't he, Daddy?" exclaimed Eva, peering with me at the angry little creature. Presently he moved farther into the darkness, away from the tormenting twig, but, as it could still reach him there, his patience at last became exhausted, and suddenly he had uncoiled himself and was gliding, with all the grace of his evil beauty, into the glass jar.

Eva gave a little scream of delight and

clapped her hands. "O is n't he pretty?" she cried. "Let me take hold of him." Snakes were evidently among the multitude of things of which Eva knows no fear. However, as Eva is not Saint Paul — though in my heart I had a feeling that her courageous innocence would have protected her — I had to deny her that indulgence; one of the few I ever denied her, for I know of few with which she is not strong enough to be intrusted — though that, I suppose, is a father's point of view.

As we went down the wood with our captive securely shut in his glass cage, I explained to Eva why it was just as well not to hold snakes in your hand, and when we reached my log hut I illustrated my explanation by the old familiar method. Cutting a forked stick from a tree hard by, I set the jar down on the grass, and when the adder, believing that freedom had come at last, began to glide through the loophole I had made for him, I pinned him down to the earth at the back of his wicked head. In vain

he lashed his body like a silver whip with rage; and while I thus held him I took my penknife and forced open his cruel mouth, so that Eva could see his evil forked tongue. Then we let him go back into his bottle, and dropped green leaves down to him, so that he might feel comfortable, and looked about for beetles and such small insects as we thought might appeal to his appetite and console him for his captivity. But these attentions he received with sullen indifference. Whether it was that he was too angry to eat, or that we had made a mistake in his diet, our limited knowledge of natural history did not enable us to decide.

Nor were we left much more time to consider; for, suddenly as we knelt together side by side on the grass, our eyes intent on our captive, and the alarmed scrambling of the various small insects tumbling over each other to get out of his way, we heard a voice behind us.

"Are n't you ashamed of yourselves?" the voice said.

Eva and I looked at each other. It was her mother's voice. We were caught! In our hearts we were not in the least ashamed; but we bent our heads in mock penitence, pretending that we were afraid to look up.

"Really I don't know which is the biggest baby," the voice continued, with direct personal application to myself.

Then Eva and I took courage and looked up into the bluebell eyes above us, and all three of us broke into laughter.

"It 's all very well to laugh," said Eva's mother, with a sudden affectation of severity, mindful of the necessity of impressing Eva, "but this is a very demoralising little girl. Have n't I told you, Eva, that you were not to disturb father at his work?"

Eva was a brick and did n't give me away. She kept a set little face of respectful rebellion, imperturbable, unapologetic. She was n't going to betray me.

"Really it was not her fault," I said shamefacedly; "it was all mine. Punish me, if

you must; but not her." And then we laughed again.

"What are you going to do with this poor beast here?" asked Eva's mother, pointing to the glass jar. "Let him go, I suppose," I said.

I saw Eva's eyes light up for a moment. There was just one last bit of fun left before she must return to the humdrum of the nursery.

So then we took the lid from the jar, and presently the adder, sniffing the air, stole cautiously out on the grass, and then at length, realising that he was really at liberty, flashed his way from our sight into the underbrush, with the joy of all natural things at being free once more — a bird released from his cage, or a happy fish thrown back into the stream. The beetles and the various other bugs seemed no less to appreciate their freedom.

Alas! it was poor Eva's turn to go back into captivity. Mine too, for my desk gloomed there inside. We gave each other

a parting look, as her mother took her off down the wood. So two exiles condemned to Siberia might exchange glances of sympathy. But all the same we had had a good time, and we both knew that, in spite of all law and authority, we intended to have many more up there in the woodland, Eva and I.

The Dream Documents

THE DREAM DOCUMENTS

THE dream has come to an end, and I have just received a letter asking for a return of the dream documents. In other words, Miranda has written asking me to send back her letters. She is going to be married soon. Incidentally, so am I.

Our dream came to an end quite a while ago. But it was a very long and beautiful dream — dreams seldom last so long — and I did hope that Miranda would allow me to keep its beautiful records. But no! I have to send all that brilliant writing back again; all the fancy and wit and tenderness which make such a living history of a fairy tale.

Perhaps Miranda wants to read the fairy tale over again, and is not satisfied with my poor records of it. That may be the reason why she wants those letters back. It can hardly be any common reason, such as

actuates common lovers when they make a like demand. She knows how I reverence the memory of our dream, and I think she is almost as proud to have dreamed it as I am.

We are not bitter or jealous toward each other, but, on the contrary, each of us is glad that the other is so happy with — some one else. Such sorrow as remains to us is the abstract, wistful sorrow which natures, such as ours — and O Miranda, how alike we were! — feel at the passing of any beautiful thing. The pathos of "*The grass withereth, the flower fadeth*". . . .

Ah! Miranda, how can we confidently complete that solemn sentence, when so seemingly everlasting a thing as our love has passed away? If that is gone, can there really be anything in the universe that endureth forever!

I suppose that it is the humiliated sense of this transitoriness of what had seemed an immortal feeling that makes men and women who have loved and lost each other, as Miranda and I, return those letters, which

have thus come to seem the ludicrously earnest records of an illusion.

The two people feel that they have been tricked into these solemn utterances of the heart, as if Life had been playing a game with them, which they, unsuspecting, had taken seriously. They feel a little silly, as one does when some jocular friend, as we say, takes us in with some mock-serious story. We sit, attentive and eager, while he talks, and believe every word, and then suddenly the stealing smile upon his face tells us that we have been fooled. So we sit and listen to Love telling his old tale, as if he had never told it before, with such lit young eyes and such irresistible persuasion; and then, suddenly — there comes the smile stealing over his face, and we look at each other and know that we have been fooled.

This is not my view of the matter, but I conceive that it is the view of those who, like Miranda, wish to obliterate the records of an old dream. For my part, the fact of a feeling passing away is nothing against the reality

of that feeling. All feelings must sooner or later pass away:

> The sunrise blooms and withers on the hill
> Like any hill-flower, and the noblest troth
> Dies here to dust . . . .

That the rose must shed its petals and turn to a lonely autumn berry is surely nothing against the reality of the rose. It was real enough in June.

Yes, it is because I feel so deeply the reality of this dream that has passed away that I wish Miranda would let me keep her beautiful record of it. If it had been real no other way, it would be real in her words, for beautiful words make all things real, and are, perhaps, the longest lived of all realities. So long as Miranda's letters survive, our dream is not dead. It has only ascended into the finer life of words. But once her letters are gone, the dream is dead indeed; for, even though my poor letters should survive — well! I never could write a love-letter. The writing of love-letters is a woman's art, and Miranda,

in these precious pages which she demands of me, has proven herself a great artist.

As I think of this, of the art I mean, with which she has embodied our dream, I wonder if I have any right to return her letters; whether, in fact, it is not my duty, in defiance of misapprehension, to retain and guard them in the interests of art, and, even, humanity. For, you see, there is but one fate for Miranda's letters the moment they leave my hands to return to hers — the crematorium. She will probably burn them with charming fanciful rites, after her whimsical, picturesque nature; load the bier on which they are consumed with cassia and myrrh and all the chief spices — but, however sweet-smelling the savour with which they return to the elemental spaces from which they drew down their radiant energy, there will, none the less, remain of them upon the earth, but a little fluttering pile of perfumed ashes — the ashes of a dream.

Now, have I the right to allow such destruction of a beautiful thing, such a holocaust

of heavenly words? My mind misgives me no little as to this. Meanwhile, I shall temporise with Miranda, make some plausible excuse for delay, if only that I may read through the fairy tale once more from beginning to end, before, if needs must, I send it back to her.

Another problem: I am wondering, as I turn over page after page of our brilliantly written past, whether Miranda will expect me to return also the many flowers that every now and again fall out from between the fragrant sheets. Even supposing that she can remember every letter she has written to me, and is capable of detecting me should I filch a single one, she can hardly remember the flowers of eight summers! Yes, eight summers. I said that our dream was a very long and beautiful one; and, indeed, it is hard to understand why, when a dream has lasted so long, it should not last forever. But such is the way of dreams, and surely Miranda and I were fortunate in that ours lasted so long.

Here is a flower I certainly shall keep, whatever happens. This arrowhead, with its keen, beautiful leaf beside it. Do you remember the day we gathered this, Miranda? How I climbed down from the little bridge, and picked my way over the stones of the brook that went singing out of the sun into the cool darkness? It grew right in the shadow of the rough stone arch, and when I came out with it in my hand, there were you standing on a stepping-stone just behind me; and some treacherous gold pin had loosened the wheatsheaf of your hair, and, as we stood together on those quaking stones in the middle of the little stream, we looked into each other's eyes. And just then a catbird began singing in a meadow nearby. Do you remember? And may I keep this arrowhead, Miranda?

And this flower, too — this strange, waxen flower that made us a little afraid because we said it looked beautiful as death, not knowing then how near we had come to its name. We found it growing in the depths of

the woods, a haunted, lonely thing, and we plucked it as one might pluck mandragora, almost expecting weird cries and lamentations rising from the ground. The innocent children call it "Indian's-pipe." Some call it "corpse-flower." What shall we call it, Miranda?

And here again is a flower no one shall rob me of. A simple, childish flower indeed. Only a spray of Crimson Rambler. At least you will let me keep that, Miranda. You will not deprive me of that.

I have just found something else pressed between the pages of a letter: another kind of flower — a butterfly. A great, yellow butterfly with tails to his wings. I caught it for fun, not meaning to hurt it; and then suddenly an impulse came over me, and I crushed it between the pages of a book we were reading, as though one should capture a sunbeam of some summer-day on which we were very happy. When I opened the book again — Do you remember the book? — the flower wings were quiet as any other petals,

and we both looked at each other with a feeling of fear, of omen. We who hated cruelty and abhorred death had killed a little, beautiful, innocent creature; and we felt afraid, and said little as we went homeward; but our eyes said:

"Suppose it were love we killed to-day, that 'Psyche,' that frail butterfly thing — *Animula, Vagula, blandela!*"

I wonder again, as the little wings fall from the folded sheet. At all events, that was our last day together in the fields. Since then the arrowhead has flowered in the brook — but not for us. That was our last summer-day.

Our last summer-day! I let your letters fall from my hands, Miranda, as I say over to myself, "Our last summer-day" —for it is again summer, "a summer-day in June." How strange it seems, after all: summer again, and no Miranda. I could almost say with the sad Irish poet:

> "Has summer come without the rose,
> And left the bird behind?"

For you, Miranda, seemed very summer herself. The sun-goddess you seemed, the blonde young mother of the green boughs and the knee-deep grass. When you looked upon the meadows they filled like the sky at evening with blue flowers, and when you spoke, the woods rang with a thousand birds. The very fish leaped up out of the talking stream to catch a glimpse of your shining hair. Wherever you passed life sprang up, abundant, blossoming, filled with the laughter of immortal summer.

Ah! to what enchanted youth, this "summer-day in June," in what Broceliande of green boughs, or nymph-haunted secrecy of rocky pools, are you teaching the lesson of summer?

"A summer-day in June!" As I say those words over to myself, do you wonder, Miranda, that I should sorrow to part with the beautiful history of eight summers?

I suppose that I must send that history back, whatever my feelings as an art custodian may be. Miranda loves someone else

and feels it only right to him. And I love someone else, and should, I suppose, feel it only right to her. Actually I have neither feeling. On the contrary, I hold that new love should be grateful to the old love for the lesson in loving which it has taught.

One might adapt the old song and say:

> "I could not love thee so, dear love,
> Had I not loved before."

So, I confidently believe that Miranda could not have loved her new love so adequately had she not loved me inadequately before. And, on the other hand, I am well aware that I could never have loved my true love as I do, had it not been for my eight years apprenticeship to Miranda.

Love is a mysterious spiritual training, and we are apt to learn its lessons too late to apply them. Surely it is not too late for Miranda. I can only hope that it is not too late for me.

Having finally decided, both against my heart and my artistic judgment, that Miranda's request for her letters must be acceded

to, I am not yet out of the wood. One more problem, and that not the least, remains to be solved. By what method of transportation shall I transmit so precious and so distinguished a consignment?

I am well aware that there are men alive to-day, who, in all the simple Philistinism of their natures, would commit Miranda's letters to the care of a stoutly-stringed, brown paper parcel, under the insured promise of a responsible express company. We all have our ways of doing things. That would, of course, be an absolutely secure way. Miranda would surely get her letters back that way, or claim the insurance. No doubt this method of transportation would be as satisfactory to Miranda as any other, for the letters we write mean so little to us — when they come back.

However, I cannot reconcile myself to returning Miranda's letters in any such commonplace way. I simply could n't return Miranda's letters in a brown paper parcel.

How then shall I return them?

I have thought of three ways.

Remember that these letters are to me more precious, more important, than the secret messages of kings. They must be delivered with appropriate ceremony.

Three ways have I thought of:

First, I thought that I would place them in an urn of bronze wreathed round with laurel, and that six white horses should bring them to Miranda's door.

Then I wondered if this way would not be the best: That a thousand carrier pigeons should fly to Miranda's window in the dawn, each with a letter in his beak.

But the way I should like best, and I think that it might appeal to Miranda, too, would be for me to deliver them myself at the address of a certain oak tree in a certain unforgotten woodland, "East of the sun and West of the Moon." I have already found for them a beautiful coffin, a little carved chest in which a long-dead queen of Arabia kept the sweet smelling essences and unguents of her beauty. The box is fragrant yet with memories of her rose-petal face. In this

box I will place Miranda's letters, and there will still be room enough left for mine.

Then, if Miranda will consent, I will meet her in that woodland at the rising of the moon, and, if she will bring with her my letters, we will place them in the same box with hers, and then I will dig a grave beneath the oak tree, and in it we will place the box together and cover it over with the fragrant summer mould, and leaves, and blossoms, and tears; and we will go our way, she through one green gate of the wood and I through another.

And great Nature, who gave us our dream, will thus take it back into her bosom; and Miranda's lovely thoughts will blossom again in anemone and violet, and out of that grave of beautiful words, as spring follows spring, two young oak trees will grow, inextricably entwined in root and branch, and there the birds will sing more sweetly than in any other part of the wood, and there the silence will be like the silence of a temple, and to those who sit and listen there will come soothing messages of the spirit out of the stillness.